THE ® saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY

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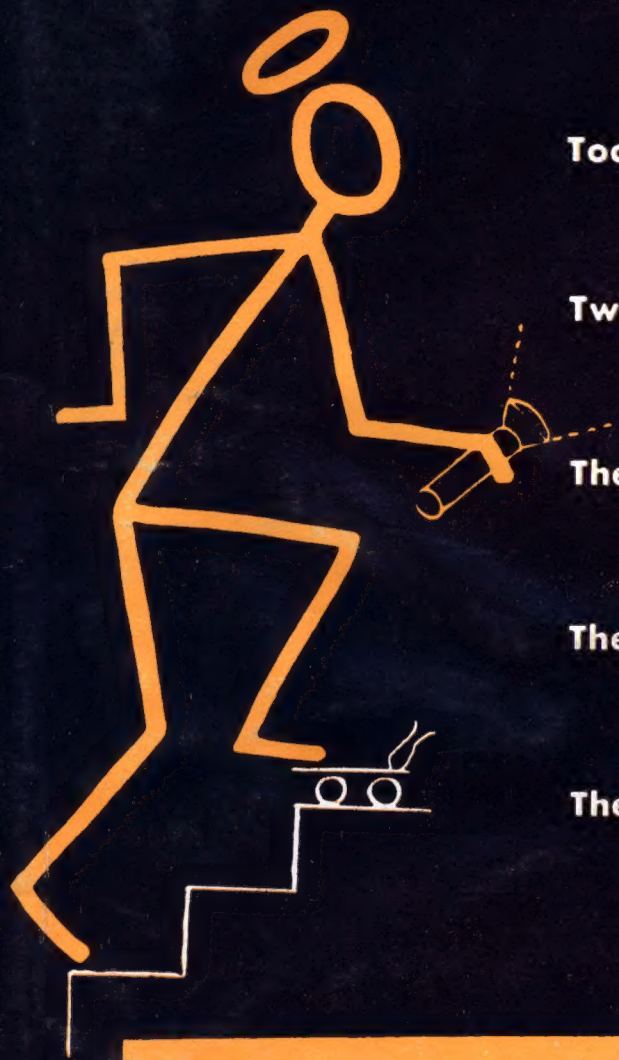
Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



Too Many Women
by GEORGE HARMON COXE

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The Watchers at the Gates
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

The Saint in Modern Art
by JEAN COCTEAU

The Uncertain Widow
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

A Medal for Don Carlos

A NEW STORY by RICHARD DEMING

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

ONE OF THE MOST flattering things that have been said to me in recent years, by which I mean in this ripe middle age, was uttered by an adorable young doll to whom I was introduced not long ago, who solemnly asked me: "Are you the son of the man who wrote the Saint stories?"

But even without going to the extreme of this intoxicating charmer, who may have been suffering from slight myopia induced by too much reading, many inquirers are amazed when they discover how long ago the Saint actually did begin, which is about 35 years. Sometimes I myself find it quite hard to believe.

It is even more interesting to reflect that those 35 years cover more than half the life of the lovable-outlaw hero as an institution in modern fiction. We so quickly become accustomed to things that once were new and surprising, like air travel and television, that it soon seems as if they had always been with us, and it takes a conscious effort to recall a world in which they didn't exist. Yet it was only in 1899 that E W Hornung, some six years after marrying Constance a sister of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and very probably in rebellion against a family life dominated by the awesome figure of Sherlock Holmes, created A J Raffles, who must be acknowledged as the ancestor of all the characters who have followed his lawless lead in scores of guises and variations.

Seven years after that—and one year before I was born—a French journalist named Maurice LeBlanc, given the job of writing a serial to fill space, created Arsene Lupin, who was to become almost as firmly established a household word and gave the cracksman theme a Gallic flavor.

Soon after which Jimmie Dale and Jimmie Valentine made their bow on the American scene, and the new tradition in crime stories was launched for keeps, and its brood of not-quite-gentlemanly adventurers began to multiply and mutate, perhaps less explosively than the descendants of Holmes, but vigorously enough to generate their own school of literature, on which someone with more scholarship and devotion than I have may write a monumental monograph some day.

All this is only 63 years, or within the living memory of many of you senior subscribers.

But what may be even more remarkable is that nothing as new and different as Holmes and Raffles has appeared *since* their conception and during the same period. Is it because they embody the only two possible essential principles? Or shall we be startled some day by another break-through of invention which will leave all us other writers gasping: "Now, why didn't *I* think of that?"

Leslie Charteris

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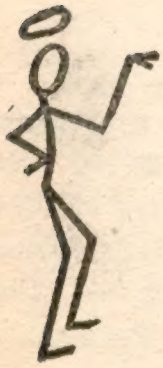

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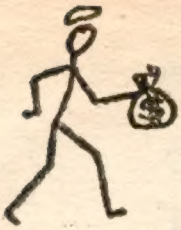

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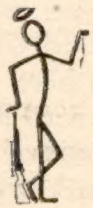
the uncertain widow

by . . . Leslie Charteris



She had to know if her husband was alive—but only the man who might have killed him could tell her. . . .

"BANDITS?" said Señor Copas. He shrugged. *"Si, hay siempre bandidos.* The Government will never catch them all. Here in Mexico they are a tradition of the country."

He looked again at the girl in the dark hat, appreciatively, because she was worth looking at, and he was a true Latin, and there was still romance in the heart that beat above his rounded abdomen.

He chuckled uncertainly, ignoring the other customers who were sitting in various degrees of patience behind their empty plates, and said: "But the señorita has nothing to fear. She is not going into the wilds."

"But I want to go into the wilds," she said.

Her voice was low and soft and musical, matching the quiet symmetry of her face and the repose of her hands. She was smart without exaggeration. She was Fifth Avenue with none of its brittle hardness, incongruously transported to that standstill Mexican village, and yet contriving not to seem out of place. To Señor Copas she was a miracle.

To Simon Templar she was a

AS A BRIGAND OF SORTS HIMSELF, THE SAINT WAS SOMEWHAT OF AN AUTHORITY ON BANDITS. BUT THIS ONE WAS DIFFERENT.

From: SAINT ERRANT
Copyright 1946 by Leslie Charteris

quickening of interest and a hint of adventure that might lead anywhere or nowhere. His eye for charm was no slower than that of Señor Copas, but there was more in it than that.

To Simon Templar, who had been called the most audacious bandit of the twentieth century, the subject was always new and fascinating. And he had an impish sense of humour which couldn't resist the thought of what the other members of the audience would have said and done if they had known that the man who was listening to their conversation about bandits was the notorious Saint himself.

"Are you more interested in the wilds or the bandits?" he asked, in Spanish as native as her own.

She turned to him with friendly brown eyes in which there was a trace of subtle mockery.

"I'm not particular."

"No es posible," said Señor Copas firmly, as he dragged himself away to his kitchen.

"He doesn't seem to like the idea," said the Saint.

He was sitting beside her, at the communal table which half filled the dining-room of the hotel. She broke a roll with her graceful, leisurely moving hands. He saw that her fingers were slender and tapering, delicately manicured, and one of them wore a wedding ring.

Fifth Avenue in the Fonda de la Quinta, in the shadow of the Sierra Madre, in the state of Durango in Old Mexico which was a very different place.

"You know a lot about this country?" she asked.

"I've been here before."

"Do you know the mountains?"

"Fairly well."

"Do you know the bandits too?"

The Saint gazed at her with precarious gravity. He looked like a man who would obviously be on visiting terms with bandits. He looked rather like a bandit himself in a debonair and reckless sort of way with his alert tanned face and clean-cut fighting mouth and the unscrupulous gay twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Listen," he said. "Once upon a time I was walking between San Miguel and Gajo, two villages not far from here. I saw from my map that the road led around in a great horseshoe, but they told me at an inn that there was a short cut, straight across, down into the canyon and up the other side. I climbed down something like the side of a precipice for hours—the path was all great loose stones, and presently one of them turned under my foot and I took a spill and sprained my ankle. When I got to the bottom I was done in. I couldn't move another step, particularly climbing. I hadn't any food, but there was a stream running through the bottom of the canyon, so I had water. I could only hope that someone else

would try that short cut and find me. . . . At the end of the third day a man did find me, and he looked like one of your bandits if anyone ever did. He did what he could for me, gave me food from his pack—bread and sausage and cheese—and then he said he would go on to San Miguel and send help for me. He could have taken everything I had, but he didn't. He was insulted when I offered to pay him. "I am not a beggar," he said, and I've never seen anything so haughty in my life—— 'I am El Rojo.'"

"Then why is Señor Copas so frightened?"

"They're all frightened of El Rojo."

Her finely pencilled brows drew together.

"El Rojo?" she said. "Who is El Rojo?"

"The greatest bandit since Villa. They're all scared because there's a rumour that he's in the district. You ought to be scared, too. They're all offended if you aren't scared of El Rojo. . . . He really is a great character, though. I remember once the Government decided it was time that something drastic was done about him. They sent out half the Mexican army to round him up. It was the funniest thing I ever heard of, but you have to know the country to see the joke."

"They didn't catch him?"

The Saint chuckled.

"One man who knew the country could laugh at three armies."

For a little while the girl was wrapped in an unapproachable solitude of thought. Then she turned to the Saint again.

"Señor," she said, "do you think you could help me find El Rojo?"

Even south of the border, he was still a Saint errant, or perhaps a sucker for adventure. He said: "I could try."

They rode out on the dazzling stone track that winds beside the river—a track which was nothing more than the marks that centuries of solitary feet had left on the riot of tumbled boulders from which the hills rose up.

The Saint lounged in the saddle, relaxed like a *vaquero,* letting his mount pick its own way over the broken rock. His mind went back to the café where they had sat together over coffee, after lunch, and he had said to her: "Either you must be a journalist looking for an unusual interview, or you want to be kidnapped by El Rojo for publicity, or you've been reading too many romantic stories and you think you could fall in love with him."

She had only smiled in her quiet way, inscrutable in spite of its friendliness, and said: "No, señor—you are wrong in all your guesses. I am looking for my husband."

The Saint's brows slanted quizzically.

"You mean you are Señora Rojo?"

"Oh, no. I am Señora Alvarez de Quevedo. Teresa Alvarez."

Then she looked at him, quickly and clearly, as if she had made up her mind about something.

"The last time I heard of my husband, he was at the Fonda de la Quinta," she said. "That was two years ago. He wrote to me that he was going into the mountains. He liked to do things like that, to climb mountains and sleep under the stars and be a man alone, sometimes—it is curious, for he was very much a city man. . . . I never heard of him again. He said he was going to climb the Gran Seño. I remembered, when I heard the name, that I had read of El Rojo in the newspapers about that time. And it seemed to me, when I heard you speak of El Rojo that perhaps El Rojo was the answer."

"If it was El Rojo," said the Saint quietly, "I don't think it would help you to find him now."

Her eyes were still an enigma.

"Even so," she said, "it would be something to know."

"But you've waited two years—"

"Yes," she said softly. "I have waited two years."

She had told him no more than that, and he had known that she did not wish to say any more, but it had been enough to send him off on that quixotic wild-goose chase.

He had been leading the way for two hours, but presently, where the trail broadened for a short distance, she brought her horse up beside his, and they rode knee to knee.

"I wonder why you should do this for me," she said.

He shrugged.

"Why did you ask me?"

"It was an impulse." She moved her hands puzzledly. "I don't know. I suppose you have the air of a man who is used to being asked impossible things. You look as if you would do them."

"I do," said the Saint modestly.

It was his own answer, too. She was a damsel in distress—and no damsel in distress had ever called on the Saint in vain. And she was beautiful, also, which was a very desirable asset to damsels in distress. And about her there was a mystery, which to Simon Templar was the trumpet call of adventure.

In the late afternoon, at one of the bends in the trail where it dipped to the level of the river, the Saint reined in his horse and dismounted at the water's edge.

"Are we there?" she said.

"No. But we're leaving the river."

He scooped water up in his hands and drank, and splashed it over his face. It was numbingly cold, but it steamed off his arms in the hot, dry air. She knelt down and drank beside him, and then sat back on her heels and looked up at the hills that hemmed them in.

A kind of shy happiness lighted her eyes, almost uncertainly, as if it had not been there for a long time and felt itself a stranger.

"I understand now," she said. "I

understand why Gaspar loved all this, in spite of what he was. If only he could have been content with it . . ."

"You were not happy?" said the Saint gently.

She looked at him.

"No, señor. I have not been happy for so long, that I am afraid."

She got up quickly and put her foot in the stirrup. He helped her to mount, and swung into his own saddle. They set off across the shallow stream, the horses picking their way delicately between the boulders.

On the far side they climbed, following a trail so faint that she could not see it at all, but the Saint rarely hesitated. Presently the trees were thicker, and over the skyline loomed the real summit of the hill they were climbing. The valley was swallowed up in darkness, and up there where the Saint turned his horse across the slope the brief, subtropical twilight was fading.

Simon Templar lighted a cigarette as he rode, and he had barely taken the first puff of smoke into his lungs when a man stepped from behind a tree with a rifle levelled and broke the stillness of the evening with a curt: *"Manos arriba!"*

The Saint turned his head with a smile.

"You've got what you wanted," he said to Teresa Alvarez. "May I present El Rojo?"

The introduction was almost superfluous, for the red mask from which El Rojo took his name, which covered his face from the brim of his sombrero down to his stubble-bearded chin was sufficient identification. Watching the girl, Simon saw no sign of fear as the bandit came forward. Her face was pale, but she sat straight-backed on her horse and gazed at him with an unexpected eagerness in her eyes. Simon turned back to El Rojo.

"Qué tál, amigo?" he murmured genially.

The bandit stared at him unresponsively.

"Baje usted," he ordered gruffly. He glanced at the girl. "You too—get down."

His eyes, after that glance, remained fixed on her, even after she was down from the saddle and standing by the horse's head. The Saint wondered for the first time whether he might not have let his zest for adventure override his common sense when he deliberately led her into the stronghold of an outlawed and desperate man.

El Rojo turned back to him.

"The señorita," he said, "will tie your hands behind you."

He dragged a length of cord from his pocket and threw it across the space between them. The girl looked at it coldly.

"Go on," said the Saint. "Do what the nice gentleman tells you. It's part of the act."

He could take care of such minor details when the time came but for the present there was a mystery

with which he was more preoccupied.

When the Saint's hands had been tied, El Rojo pointed his rifle.

"The señorita will lead the way," he said. "You will follow and I shall direct you from behind. You would be wise not to try and run away."

He watched them file past him, and from the sounds that followed, the Saint deduced that El Rojo had taken the horses by their bridles and was towing them after him as he brought up the rear.

As they moved roughly parallel with the valley, the slope on their right became steeper and steeper until it was simply a precipice, and the rocks on their left towered bleaker and higher, and they were walking along a narrow ledge with the shadow of one cliff over them and another cliff falling away from their feet into a void of darkness. The path wound snake-like around the fissures and buttresses into which the precipice was sculptured, and presently, rounding one of those natural breastworks, they found themselves at a place where the path widened suddenly to become a natural balcony about twenty feet long and twelve feet deep—and then stopped. A natural wall of rock screened it from sight of the valley or the hills on the other side.

El Rojo followed them into the niche, leading the two horses, which he tied up to an iron ring by the mouth of a cave that opened in the rock wall at the end.

There was a dull glow of embers close by the mouth of the cave. The bandit stirred them with his foot, and threw on a couple of mesquite logs.

"Perhaps you are hungry," said El Rojo. "I have little to offer my guests, but you are welcome to what there is."

"I should like a cigarette as much as anything," said the Saint. "But I'm not a very good contortionist."

The bandit considered him.

"I could untie you, señor, if you gave me your word of honour not to attempt to escape. It is, I believe, usual in these circumstances."

His speeches had an elaborate theatricalism which came oddly out of his rough and ragged clothing.

"I'll give you my word for two hours," said the Saint, after a moment's thought. "It can be renewed if necessary."

"Es bastante. Y usted, señorita?"

"Conforme."

"Entonces, por dos horas."

El Rojo laid down his rifle and untied the Saint's hands; but Simon noticed that he picked up the gun again at once, and that he kept it always within easy reach. The Saint understood the symptom well enough not to be disturbed by it. He lighted a cigarette and stretched himself out comfortably beside the fire and beside Teresa Alvarez, while the night closed down like a purple blanket and El Rojo brought out the bread and cheese and sausage and coarse red wine

which are the staple fare in the mountains.

He said presently: "I take it that you have ideas about ransom."

The bandit shrugged.

"I regret the necessity. But I am a poor man, and you must be charitable. Let us say that it was unlucky that you chose to travel this way."

"But we were looking for you," said Teresa.

El Rojo stopped with a knifeload of cheese half way to his mouth.

"For me?"

"Yes," she said. "I wanted to see you, and this gentleman was good enough to help me. We were not unlucky. We came here on purpose."

"You pay me an unusual compliment, señorita. Could one ask what I have done to deserve such a distinguished honour?"

"I am looking for my husband," she said simply.

He sat watching her.

"*No comprendo.* It is true that I often have the pleasure of entertaining travellers in the mountains. But, alas, they never stay with me for long. Either their friends are so desolate in their absence that they bribe me to ensure their safe and speedy return—or their friends are so unresponsive that I am forced to conclude that they cannot be very desirable guests. I am incapable of believing that a gentleman who had won the heart of the señora can have belonged to the latter category."

"It is possible," she said, without bitterness. "But I knew nothing of it."

She was silent for a moment.

"It was two years ago," she said. "He came here to Durango, to La Quinta. He was going into the mountains. No one ever heard of him again. I know that you were here then, and I wondered if you might have—entertained him. Perhaps I was foolish. . . ."

El Rojo dug his knife in the cheese.

"Por Dios!" he said. "Is it like that that one lives in Mexico? You have lost your husband for two years, and it is not until to-day that you want to find him?"

"I don't want to find him," she said. "I want to know that he is dead."

She said it quietly, without any force of feeling, as if it was a thought that she had lived with for so long that it had become a commonplace part of her life. But in the very passionlessness of that matter-of-fact statement there was something that sent an electric ripple up the Saint's spine.

He had finished eating, and he was sitting smoking with his feet towards the warmth of the fire and his back leaning against the rock. On his left, Teresa Alvarez was looking straight ahead of her, as if she had been alone, and El Rojo's eyes were riveted on her through the slits in his mask, so that the Saint almost felt as if he were an

eavesdropper. But he was too absorbed in the play to care about that.

"I was very young," said the girl, in that quiet and detached way that left so much emotion to be guessed at. "I was still in the convent school when I was engaged to him. I knew nothing, and I was not given any choice. I was married to him a few weeks later. Yes, these things happen. It is still the custom in the old-fashioned families. The parents choose a man they think will make their daughter a good husband, and she is expected to be guided by their wisdom."

Her face was impassive in the firelight.

"I think he was unfaithful to me on our honeymoon," she said. "I know he was unfaithful many times after that. He boasted of it. I might have forgiven that, but he boasted also that he had only married me for my dowry—and for what pleasure he could have out of me before he wanted a change. I found out that he was nothing but a shady adventurer, a gambler, a cheat, a petty swindler, a man without a shadow of honour or even common decency. But by that time I had no one to go to. . . . My father and mother died suddenly six months after we were married, and I had never had any friends of my own. It will seem strange to you—it seems strange to me, now—but I never realized that I could leave him myself. I had never been brought up to know anything of the world. So I stayed with him. For four years . . . and then he came here, and I never saw him again."

The Saint could feel the suffering and humiliation and disillusionment of those four years as vividly as if she had told the story of them day by day, and his blue eyes rested on her with a new and oddly gentle understanding.

She went on after a while: "At first I was only glad that he had gone, and that I could have some peace until he returned. He had told me that he was going away for a holiday, but one day a man from the police came to see me, and I found out that he had gone away because for once he had not been so clever as he had been before, and there was a charge against him.

"Then I hoped that the police would catch him and he would go to prison, perhaps for many years, perhaps forever. But they never found him. And I hoped that he might have fallen over a precipice in the mountains, or that he had escaped to the other end of the world, or anything that would mean he would never come back to me. I didn't mind very much what it was, so long as I never saw him again. But I was happy. And then, six months ago, I fell in love. And my happiness was finished again."

"Because you were in love?" El Rojo asked, incredulously.

"Because I was not free. This man

is everything that my husband never was, and he knows everything that I have told you. He wants to marry me. Before, I never cared where my husband was, or what had happened to him, but now, you see, I must know."

El Rojo looked up towards the Saint.

"And the señor," he said, "is he the fortunate man with whom you fell in love?"

"No. He is in Mexico City. He is in the government service, and he could not leave to come with me."

"He is rich, this man?"

"Yes," she said, and her voice was no longer cold.

There was silence for a long time—for so long that the dancing firelight died down to a steady red glow.

Teresa Alvarez gazed into the dull embers, with her arms clasped around her knees, absorbed in her own thoughts, and at last she said: "But I have only been dreaming. Even in such a small territory as this, why should anyone remember one man who was here two years ago?"

El Rojo stirred himself a little.

"Was your husband," he said, "a man of middle height, with smooth black hair and greenish eyes and a thin black moustache?"

Suddenly she was still, with a stillness that seemed more violent than movement.

"Yes," she said. "He was like that."

"And his name was Alvarez?"

"Yes. Gaspar Alvarez de Quevedo."

Her voice was no more than a whisper.

The bandit drew a gust of evil-smelling smoke from his cheap cigarette.

"Such a man was a guest of mine about two years ago," he said slowly. "I remember him best because of the ring, which I gave to a girl in Matamoros, and because he was the only guest I have had here who left without my consent."

"He escaped?"

The words came from the girl's lips with a weariness that was too deep for feeling.

"He tried to," said El Rojo. "But it was very dark, and these mountains are not friendly to those who do not know them well."

He stretched out his arm, towards the black emptiness beyond the rock wall that guarded the niche where they sat.

"I buried him where he fell. It was difficult to reach him, but I could not risk his body being seen by any goatherds going up the valley. In the morning, if you like, I will point you out his grave. It is below the path we followed to come here—more than a hundred metres down. . . . The señora may go on without fear to the happiness that life has kept waiting for her."

It was very dark, but Simon could see the tears rise in the girl's

eyes before she hid her face in her hands.

The morning sun was cutting hot swaths through the fading mist when El Rojo followed the Saint and Teresa along the winding ledge between cliff and cliff that led out of his eyrie high above the river. Where the slope of the mountain opened clear before them he called to them to stop, and held the bridle of the horse which the girl was to ride while she climbed into the saddle.

"I give you—*buen viaje,*" he said. "You can make no mistake. Follow the side of the hill until you come to a belt of trees, and then go downwards. To find your way back here—that is another matter. But if you keep going downwards you must come to the river, and on the other side of the river is the road to La Quinta. I will meet you somewhere on that road in three days from now, at about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"I can never thank you," she said.

"You have no need to," he answered roughly. "You are going to bring me—how much did we agree?—one hundred thousand pesos, and the señor remains as my guest as a surety for our meeting. I regret that I have to be commercial, but one must live, and if your lover is rich he will not mind."

She held out her hand to the Saint.

"I shall be there to meet him in three days," she said. "And then I shall be able to thank you again."

"This was nothing," he answered with his lazy smile. "But if you ever meet any dragons, I wish you'd send for me."

He kissed her fingers, and watched her ride away until the curve of the hill hid her from sight. It was true that he had done very little, but he had seen the light in her eyes before she went, and to him that was reward enough for any adventure.

He was thoughtful as he walked back along the cliff edge track towards the bandit's cave with El Rojo just behind his elbow, and when they were half way along it he said casually: "By the way, I ought to warn you that the parole I renewed last night is just running out."

The muzzle of the bandit's rifle pressed into his chest as he turned.

"In that case, señor, you will please put up your hands. Unless, of course, you prefer to renew your parole again."

Simon raised his hands to the level of his shoulders.

"My friend," he said, "have you forgotten the Arroyo Verde?"

"Perdone?"

"The Arroyo Verde," said the Saint steadily. "Between San Miguel and Gajo. Where there was a man with a sprained ankle who had been there for three days without food, and who might have stayed there until he starved if a brigand with

a price on his head had not stayed to help him."

"I have not the least idea what you are talking about."

"I thought not," said the Saint softly. "Because you weren't there."

He saw the bandit's hands go rigid around the gun, and the blue steel was as sharp as knife points in his eyes.

"I didn't think this brigand would have forgotten me so completely that we could spend an evening together without him recognising me. You see, we got quite friendly down in that forsaken canyon, and when my ankle was better I paid him a visit here. That's why I was able to find my way so easily yesterday. I came to Durango because I hoped to meet him again. And yet this brigand's name was El Rojo, too. How do you explain that—Señor Alvarez?"

For a moment the bandit was silent, standing tense and still, and Simon could feel the shattering chaos whirling through the man's mind, the wild spin of instinctive stratagems and lies sinking down to the grim realisation of their ultimate futility.

"And suppose I am Alvarez?" said the man at last, and his natural voice was quite different from the way he had been speaking before.

"Then you should tell me more about what you said last night—and about El Rojo. Where is he?"

"I found him here by accident, but he thought I was looking for him. We fought, and he fell over the precipice. He lies in the grave which I said was mine."

"And because you wanted to disappear, and because you loved the mountains, you thought that the best way for you to hide would be to take his place. No one had ever seen the face of El Rojo, no one ever knew who he was. You took his mask and became El Rojo."

"Eso es."

Alvarez had not moved. Simon could sense the taut nerves of a man who held death in his hands and was only waiting for one word to turn the scale of his decision.

Simon Templar was also waiting for the answer to one question. He said: "And last night?"

"A usted que más le da?"

"The answer is in your hands," said the Saint.

His eyes were as clear and unclouded as the sky over their heads, and there was something as ageless and unchangeable as justice in the even tones of his voice.

"Perhaps in these two years you might have changed," he said. "Perhaps you were glad that you could never go back to the old life. And perhaps you told that lie to cut the last link with it, and you were glad to set your wife free for the happiness which you never gave her. If that was so, your secret will always be safe with me. But I've never seen a man like you change very much, and I wondered why all you asked about your wife's lover was whether

he was rich. I wondered if it had occurred to you that if you let her believe you were dead, so that she would marry this man, you could go back to Mexico City and charge a price for your silence. And if that was so——"

"You will never tell her," said Alvarez viciously, and the rifle jerked in his hand.

The crack of the shot rattled back and forth, growing fainter and fainter, between the hills, and something like fire struck the Saint's chest. He smiled, as if something amused him.

"You're wasting your time," he said. "I took all the bullets out of the shells in your gun while you were asleep last night. But you've told me what I wanted to know. I said that the answer was in your own hands——"

Alvarez came out of the superstitious trance which had gripped him for a moment. He snatched the rifle back and then lunged with it savagely. Simon stepped to the right, and the thrust passed under his left arm. Then he swung his right fist to Alvarez's jaw. Alvarez was on the very edge of the path, and the force of the blow lifted him backwards with his arms sprawling. . . .

Simon Templar stood for some time gazing down into the abyss. His face was serene and untroubled, and he felt neither pity nor remorse. His mind went on working calmly and prosaically. There was no need for Teresa Alvarez to know. Nothing would disturb her conscience if she went on believing what she had been told the night before. And she would think well of El Rojo, who to her would always be the real El Rojo whom Simon had called his friend.

He would have to think up some story to account for El Rojo deciding to waive his claim to the hundred thousand pesos she had promised. He went thoughtfully back to collect his horse.

a medal for don carlos

by . . . Richard Deming

EVEN ON SO SIMPLE an excursion from his fortified headquarters as a visit to a monastery, General Don Carlos Garcia took no chances of assassination. Newspapers called the Latin-American dictator "the best-guarded man in the world."

He had to be to continue living, for probably he was also the best-hated man in the world. At least within his own country. There were few families in the little republic which had not had some close relative stood before a firing squad on the general charge of "subversion of the government," which as often as not meant nothing more than a dropped remark criticizing the dictator. They were the lucky political prisoners. Those arrested for actual counter-revolutionary activity were turned over to the secret police to meet slower and more lingering deaths.

Secret police arrived at the monastery at mid-morning, well in advance of the intended visit. Every room of the ancient building was examined with miscroscopic thoroughness, and even the monks themselves were searched for wea-

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As we have reported previously, Richard Deming is the author of THE CASE OF THE CRIME LORD (Pocket Books), THIS IS MY NIGHT (Monarch), and other novels. Readers of SMM will remember BLOOD OATH, which appeared in our March 1962 issue. Moon will return; now, instead, we meet Don Carlos Garcia . . .

pons. The old abbot accepted the indignity because he had no choice, but his very air of stoicism suggested what he thought of such high-handed treatment.

The invasion came during the regular morning hour of contemplation and prayer, but the invaders made no apology for their timing. Since under the iron rule of General Don Carlos Garcia even the churches were no longer sacrosanct from unheralded entry by secret police, they were hardly likely to have qualms about disturbing the routine of a mere monastery.

In one of the cells a man in monk's habit knelt in an attitude of prayer. He wasn't a very imposing looking man. Of average height and build, he had average features of neither ugliness nor handsomeness. He was the sort of man who, in civilian clothes, would have merged into crowds, hardly to be noticed. Even in monk's tunic and scapular, he probably wouldn't have drawn more than a single curious glance if seen walking down the street.

When he heard hard-heeled boots strike the tile floor of the hallway leading to his cell door, the man quickly bounced to his feet and opened the small wooden chest with which each cell was furnished to store its occupant's few personal possessions. The chest was identical to that in all other cells, except that this had a metal lining. He lifted out a small but thick gold medal attached to a gold chain. The medal had the appearance of ancientness, its carved face so worn with time that it could barely be made out to bear the image of St. Christopher.

Fastening the chain about his neck, he slid the medal down inside his tunic to lie next to his skin. Then he closed the chest again and faced the door.

No knock preceded the opening of the door. It simply crashed back against the wall. The spare, ramrod-straight figure of a man in the uniform of a colonel of police appeared in the doorway.

The man in monk's habit recognized the colonel, even though he had never seen him before. Colonel Jose Munoz was known throughout the republic. Director of the secret police, he was the only member of the dreaded organization who wore military uniform. All other members wore civilian clothes. Colonel Munoz had full responsibility for his leader's safety and he was quite efficient at his job. Under his careful direction General Don Carlos Garcia never moved from his guarded and fortified headquarters until his route and every person he was to come in contact with had been thoroughly checked by the colonel and his men.

Behind the colonel was the figure of the aged abbot, and behind him two hard-faced men in civilian clothes.

After a glance about the bare

room, the colonel said over his shoulder, "This is the one?"

"It is Brother Bartholomew," the abbot said in a quiet voice.

Advancing into the room, the colonel looked its occupant up and down. "You are the monk who owns the St. Christopher medal?"

"Yes."

"That thing has gotten more newspaper space than the premier's last speech," Colonel Munoz said with an attempt at affability. "Do you really think it has all that miraculous power?"

The man called Brother Bartholomew said softly, "I have never claimed it has miraculous power. When I was sole survivor of the plane crash, I said it was God's will. It was news reporters who credited the medal, after learning I wore it on the previous occasions that God saw fit to spare my life."

"Can you blame them?" the colonel asked. "A shipwreck where everyone but you was lost, an avalanche and a guerilla firing squad. You seem to have more lives than a cat. How does it feel to be totally immune to injury?"

The monk said in a sad voice, "I see that the speculations of certain journalists have led you to attach superstitious significance to the medal, Colonel. If I had realized all this publicity would ensue when reporters questioned me after the plane crash, I would never have mentioned the medal."

"Then you would never have experienced the honor of a personal visit from our beloved premier," the colonel said dryly. "He is coming to see you."

"General Garcia?" the monk asked in surprise.

Colonel Munoz nodded. "In a couple of hours. As soon as security checks are completed."

Turning, he barked instructions at the men in civilian clothes, who were waiting alertly just outside the door. Moving past the old abbot into the room, they searched it with swift efficiency. It didn't take very long, for all it contained was a cot, a three-legged stool, the small wooden chest and a ceremonial cowl hanging from a wall peg. The few items in the chest, now that the medal was no longer there, didn't possess a total value of ten pesos, but they were examined with as much care as if they had been priceless gems.

When the men finished searching the room, the colonel pointed at its occupant.

"Hold your arms out from your sides," one of the men ordered crisply.

Silently the man in monk's habit obeyed. The two policemen ran their hands lightly over his body, even carefully patting his legs to insure no weapons were strapped there.

"Nothing," one of them reported to the colonel.

The monk looked curiously at the two men who had searched him,

then glanced at the abbot standing in the doorway.

"The general fears assassination, my son," the old man said. "He looks for it even in the most unlikely places."

Colonel Munoz frowned at the abbot, then turned to the monk. "The premier will be here within a couple of hours, Brother Bartholomew. I will have to ask you not to leave your cell until he has been here and gone, because we don't want you in contact with anyone else once you're security-cleared. There will be a man posted outside your door, and also outside your cell window, so please don't disobey my instructions."

Bartholomew glanced at the abbot again.

"You may be excused from choir, Brother Bartholomew," the abbot said in a resigned voice.

"That's all for the time being," Colonel Munoz said in a dismissing tone.

He walked from the room, trailed by the two plain-clothesmen. The abbot drew the door shut from outside.

The moment the door shut, the monk slipped the chain from about his neck and dropped the medal back in the metal-lined wooden chest. Glancing out his cell window, he saw a lounging man in civilian clothes immediately outside.

He sat down to await the arrival of the dictator.

It was nearly noon when Brother Bartholomew heard hard-heeled boots on the hallway tile again. Quickly he retrieved the gold medal and fastened it about his throat.

The door opened as unceremoniously as it had the first time and again Colonel Munoz stood in the doorway. After a quick glance about the room, he said over his shoulder, "All right, Your Excellency."

He moved inside, followed by a portly, middle-aged man in the uniform of an army general. The man's lips were formed into an affable smile, but the smile didn't reach to his eyes. Perpetually half shut, the drooping lids couldn't quite hide the burning, almost psychotic cruelty deep within the eyes.

The same two men in civilian clothes who had previously searched the room started to follow the dictator in, but were waved back by General Garcia. Colonel Munoz shut the door in their faces.

General Don Carlos Garcia glanced about the bare room, frowned at the three-legged stool and chose the cot as a sitting place. From a silver cigarette case he chose a perfumed cigarette. Colonel Munoz instantly held the flame of a lighter to it.

The general inhaled, blew out a thin wisp of smoke and examined the monk through it. He said in an indulgent tone, "So you are the Brother Bartholomew all the papers are writing about."

Bartholomew inclined his head

in a bare nod. "It is an honor to have so distinguished a person visit my humble cell, General."

There was a touch of irony in his voice, but Garcia chose to ignore it. "What's your real name?" he inquired.

The monk raised his eyebrows in question.

"You take the name of some saint when you enter an order, don't you?" the dictator asked. "What was your name before you became a monk?"

"I am not exactly a monk," Bartholomew said. "Though I am called one by the outside world and am called Brother here. I am an oblate."

General Garcia's eyebrows went up. "What in the devil is an oblate?"

"One who voluntarily attaches himself to a monastery without taking the vows of religion. We wear the habit and share all the privileges and exercises of the community, but retain property rights and are free to leave at any time. We make a promise of obedience to the abbot which binds us as long as we remain in the abbey, but it isn't in the nature of a religious vow."

"Well, well," the general said in a tone of surprise. "You learn something new every day."

This interesting sidelight on monastic life seemed to divert him from his question about Brother Bartholomew's original name, for he didn't return to it. He said, "You seem to do a lot of traveling for a monk, or oblate, or whatever you are. I thought you fellows never came from behind your monastery walls."

"You're thinking of Trappist monks, General," Colonel Munoz put in. "This is the Benedictine Order. They do a lot of missionary work. Then, too, oblates come and go as they please."

"Not quite," Bartholomew modified. "We come and go with the permission of the abbot. But it is true that we are freer than the brothers who have taken vows."

"Apparently," Garcia said. "Tell me something of your experiences, Brother Bartholomew. Is what the newspapers say true?"

The monk said dryly, "There has been some journalistic exaggeration."

"But all your miraculous escapes did happen, didn't they?" the general persisted. "You were the sole survivor of that ship that went down off the Chinese coast four years ago, for instance, weren't you?"

Bartholomew's face formed a slight smile. "The journalists neglected to mention that I am a powerful swimmer."

Garcia smiled also. "Did your swimming ability help when your party was caught in that avalanche in the Atlas Mountains?"

"I was lucky enough to be stand-

ing beneath a small overhang of rock."

The general's smile widened. "Did you still have that overhang with you when the guerillas opposing my regime took you for a spy last year and stood you before a firing squad? Was that what made twelve rifles miss you completely at point-blank range?"

"I have always felt it was deliberate," the monk said. "I believe the soldiers were doubtful that I was really a spy. You must remember that the guerillas were all Catholic."

Garcia frowned. Though he had been openly at war with the Catholic Church ever since he seized power, he didn't like to be reminded that most of the population embraced that faith. A trifle testily he asked, "What did that have to do with it?"

"Perhaps, because of my religious garb, each man secretly decided to miss, unaware that his companions had all come to the same decision. And of course I pretended to be shot. I lay limp as they dumped me in the mass grave with the others."

"You have a logical explanation for everything, don't you?" the general growled. "What's your explanation for walking away unscathed from a plane which crashed in flames, killing the other forty-two passengers instantly?"

After a moment of silence, the monk said simply, "I can only say it must have been the will of God."

"Or your St. Christopher medal. Is it as ancient as they say? Do you believe it is actually the original one, blessed by St. Christopher himself?"

"That's the legend handed on to me by my father. There is no historical record to support the claim. It is not even known how the medal first came into possession of my family. But traditionally it has always been passed on to the eldest son."

Garcia said, "As a monk, you won't have any sons."

"I am merely an oblate," Bartholomew corrected. "It is possible that at some future time I may return to the world and even marry."

"Do you contemplate that?"

The monk shook his head. "Not in the foreseeable future. And, unfortunately, I was an only child."

"Then actually you could dispose of the medal as you see fit. Or does everything you own become the property of the order so long as you remain an oblate?"

"As an oblate I haven't lost property rights. It is mine to do with as I wish. But I don't plan to dispose of it."

"You will forgive me for asking all these questions," Garcia said. "But I am not very well acquainted with the affairs of the Church. I have never been a church-going man."

"I know," the monk said dryly.

"I have even been criticized for my attitude toward the Church.

Particularly in relation to the monasteries. Some ignorant people feel that the Republic's confiscation of part of the various monastic orders' huge land holdings is sacrilegious."

Bartholomew made no comment.

"Ridiculous, of course. Our glorious revolution was against the monopolistic landowners. And who was the largest landowner of all?" When the monk made no answer, the general answered himself. "The Church, and particularly the monasteries."

Bartholomew still made no comment.

"This place is the last Benedictine monastery in the Republic, Brother Bartholomew. Did you know that?"

"I am aware of it," the monk said without inflection.

"It would be too bad to have such a fine order disappear entirely. The order should have a lay protector. Someone high in government office who considered himself its personal sponsor and would block all attempts at further land confiscation."

"Someone such as your excellency?" the monk asked quietly.

"I would be honored to be considered the lay protector of the order. I would do everything in my power to keep meddling bureaucrats from interfering with this monastery in any way."

"Do we need such powerful protection?"

The general looked around for an ash tray, saw none and carefully stepped on his cigarette with the heel of a polished boot. In a tone of mock regret he said, "As premier I naturally have to sign the confiscation orders passed by the assembly. Just this morning a new stack was laid on my desk. The entire land holdings of this monastery was included, I am sorry to say. Of course the order doesn't become law until I sign it."

For several moments the monk was silent. Finally he said, "I have heard that while you are not a religious man, you are extremely superstitious. I had a higher opinion of your intelligence, General. Do you really believe that wearing a small gold medal about your neck would give you a charmed life?"

Garcia flushed slightly and Colonel Munoz frowned at the monk's near impertinence. The general growled, "Hasn't it given you one?"

"I doubt it. The medal is merely a symbol of St. Christopher's protective power. I believe it was God's will, perhaps expressed at the suggestion of St. Christopher in Heaven, which preserved my life on several occasions. Not the medal itself."

The general's flush faded and he smiled. "You are merely saying that the medal acts as a sort of radio sending set focused on St. Christopher in Heaven to call attention to the wearer. He looks down and knows of any peril the wearer is in. Is that it?"

"You are perverting faith to

superstition," Bartholomew protested. "I believe God saved me because He still had work for me to do on earth. When He is finally ready to take me from this earth, I am certain no amount of good-luck charms will prevent Him."

"You believe as you wish, and I'll believe my way," Garcia said. "I don't much care how the medal works, so long as it works. And quite obviously it has worked for you. If that's superstition, then I am not alone. Most people in this hemisphere believe you are divinely protected by the medal. Even in the United States. The American wire services picked up the story, you know."

Brother Bartholomew sighed. "People are too credulous."

"You wouldn't want the protector of your order to succumb to some assassination attempt, would you? Almost certainly my successor would sign that confiscation order."

"You fear assassination?" the monk asked.

The general raised his eyebrows. "You people in this place live too secluded a life. Have you never heard of Ramon Diaz?"

"Of course. The head of the opposition junta. But he is but one man. And you—" Bartholomew tacitly finished the sentence by indicating Colonel Munoz as the symbol of the armed protection constantly surrounding the dictator.

"He has agents," General Garcia said. "Hundreds. The Yankee imperialists pour unlimited funds into the coffers of any counter-revolutionist who attempts to overthrow our regime."

The monk said softly, "But it is whispered that Ramon Diaz has vowed to end your life personally. How could he ever get past your armed guard?"

"Who knows what he can do?" Garcia inquired irritably. "The man is an eel. For a full year he has skipped in and out of the Republic at will, now seen in our capital city, next in Miami trying to raise funds from American capitalists, then back here again. He laughs in the faces of our efficient secret police." He glowered at Colonel Munoz.

The colonel said hastily, "Every man in my organization has memorized his description, Your Excellency."

"I have seen that famous description," the dictator said with scorn. "Mr. Average Man. It would fit you, Colonel, or Brother Bartholomew here, or every second man you see on the street. Why can't you get a photograph?"

"There are none," Colonel Munoz said apologetically.

"Bah!" the general said. He turned back to the monk. "Well, Brother Bartholomew, have you come to any decision?"

The monk contemplated for a moment. Then he asked, "When would this confiscation order go into effect?"

"The moment I signed it. If I signed it."

For a moment or two more the monk remained silent with inward contemplation. Then, with a resigned air, he unfastened the chain from about his neck and pulled the medal from inside his tunic. Silently he held it out to the general.

General Garcia's face broke into a beaming smile which even managed to reach his eyes.

When General Don Carlos Garcia's party had departed, Brother Bartholomew walked up the hall to the abbot's office and discreetly knocked on the door. When the old man called for him to come in, he opened the door and entered.

"Have the last of them gone?" the abbot asked.

Bartholomew nodded. "I am expecting some friends to call for me soon. Have I permission to leave until this evening?"

The old man frowned. "I have been most lenient with you during the past year you have lived among us, Brother Bartholomew. You are welcome here as long as you wish to stay. But with all the outside activities you seem to be engaged in, do you think you are really suited to the monastic life?"

"Perhaps not," Bartholomew said. "I may not be a trial to you much longer. But at the moment I have nowhere else to go, so I ask your indulgence for a short time more. Today's business is really important."

"All right," the old man said with a sigh. "Please try to be back in time for evening devotions."

A half hour later a gray sedan pulled onto the monastery grounds. Brother Bartholomew was waiting at the front gate. When he climbed into the car, it immediately drove off again.

Three other men were in the car. The driver, a dark, lean man with a hooked nose, asked over his shoulder, "How did it go, Ramon?"

The man in monk's habit said, "He thinks he talked me out of it. He was going to confiscate the monastery's land if I didn't make him a gift of the medal." He glanced at his seat companion, a thin, elderly man with a Prince Albert beard. "It took him forever to get to the point, Doctor. I must have had about an hour's exposure."

The doctor pursed his lips. "I doubt that you'll have to worry about that short a time."

Bartholomew looked at the third man, who sat sidewise in the front seat staring into the back one. The man was about forty, with a long, narrow, intelligent face. He wore a crew cut and horn-rimmed glasses and was obviously an American.

"Who are you?" the monk asked.

The driver answered for the man. "Dan Cottrell, Ramon."

The monk's eyes narrowed. "The American columnist? Have you all gone crazy?"

"We had to let him in on it," the driver said. "He was going to blow the whole thing wide open. He's promised not to print a word until it's all over, provided he gets an exclusive story."

The American journalist said, "I did some digging, Senor Diaz. Enough to convince me your famous medal was a hoax. I haven't been able to find a single Catholic historian who ever heard of it until it got all this news coverage."

The man in monk's habit said to the driver, "How much does he know?"

"Not much more than he's just told you. Plus the fact that you were Brother Bartholomew. We had to tell him that in order to silence him. We thought it was safe. The American press has always been solidly on our side against Don Carlos, and Senor Cottrell has been particularly sympathetic to our cause. When he learned you were responsible for the hoax, he agreed to co-operate. All we've promised him is an exclusive interview with you."

Dan Cottrell said, "Whatever you're doing, I'm all for, Senor Diaz. In my book Garcia is a monster who ought to be boiled in oil. But I'm also a newspaperman. I want the whole story."

Ramon Diaz glanced out at the countryside speeding by. The road twisted and turned down the mountainside upon which the monastery was perched, and at that moment a turn allowed them a momentary glimpse of the ancient building above them.

He said, "If you publish the story now, the plan will not only fail, but almost certainly the general will wreck vengeance on the monastery. And the monks had no part of it. They don't even know who I really am."

"I'm willing to hold off until you give me the green light. Providing you tell me everything."

"And if I don't, you will publish what you know?"

The columnist grinned. "I told you I'm a newspaperman."

The man in monk's habit sighed. "If you were a fellow countryman, we could quietly dispose of you. But, unfortunately, I have a healthy respect for the power of the American press."

Cottrell didn't look in the least perturbed. "If you were Garcia, I'd be worried. But you don't operate his way. I think I'm safe."

"You are," Diaz said gloomily. "What do you want to know?"

"First, where are we going?"

"To Doctor Morales' house for me to change into civilian clothes, then to a meeting of the junta. You won't be able to attend that."

"All right," the columnist said agreeably. "How did you work that plane crash? *That* was no hoax, but I can hardly believe you sacrificed forty-two lives for an effect."

"It was an accident," Diaz said. "We planned to crack up a small

chartered plane in the mountains. The story was to be that it was transporting four monks to the monastery. We arranged with a morgue keeper who happens to be a member of the junta to supply us with four unclaimed bodies. One would have been dressed in the pilot's clothing when the wrecked plane was found, the other three in monks' habits. I would have been found resting alongside the wrecked plane unharmed. Then the transport from Miami crashed and we changed plans. My friends here were taking me back to the monastery after a meeting of the junta when we heard it on the car radio. We got to the scene within minutes of the crash. It was still burning when I mingled with the crowd and announced I had been on the plane."

"But Brother Bartholomew was on the passenger list. Supposedly returning from a pilgrimage to some Florida shrine."

"We have agents in Miami too," Diaz said dryly. "One happens to work for the airline. A long-distance phone call took care of that."

The columnist said, "How about those other miracles? I checked on them. A ship actually did founder off the coast of China four years ago, with all passengers lost. I couldn't find any record of the avalanche in the Atlas Mountains, but there is a record of a monk named Brother Bartholomew being executed as a spy by a counter-revolutionary firing squad last year."

"There was an avalanche," Diaz assured him. "We did careful research. As to Brother Bartholomew, I chose that name because such a monk *had* been executed. Who was to prove he hadn't simulated death and had later crawled from the mass grave he was tossed into?"

Cottrell nodded. "Now we come to the important question. What's the purpose of this elaborate hoax?"

"To get General Don Carlos Garcia to wear the medal. He's such a superstitious fool, we figured he'd come running after a charm he thought would make him immune to assassination. Because of the manner in which he's guarded, there wasn't a hope of reaching him any other way."

"What is his wearing the medal going to accomplish?"

Ramon Diaz said to the elderly doctor, "You'd better explain that, Doctor."

Dr. Morales said, "Do you know what gamma rays are, Senor Cottrell?"

Cottrell said doubtfully, "X-rays, aren't they?"

"Not quite. Similar, but of shorter wave length. They are quite effective in treating cancer and certain other disorders. But they are also quite dangerous if the body is subject to prolonged exposure. They act on the bone marrow in such a way as to interfere with the formation of red corpuscles, which, as you prob-

ably know, carry oxygen through the blood stream to the vital organs. When a point is reached where insufficient corpuscles remain in the blood stream to carry the amount of oxygen the vital organs require, the patient dies. There is no treatment for the condition once it has reached a critical point, for gamma rays permanently destroy the bone marrow's ablity to manufacture red corpuscles. There do happen to be warning symptoms. First a localized burn similar to sunburn, later skin ulceration. But when a patient has been subject to a massive bombardment of gamma rays over a prolonged period, it is usually too late to do anything about it by the time symptoms appear."

Cottrell said in a fascinated voice, "The medal?"

"Exactly," the doctor said. "He is now wearing it in the center of his chest, where the rays can reach all the rib bones. The marrow of the bones in the chest area is a major producer of red corpuscles. This was a very expensive medal, Senor Cottrell. We could have bought a couple of American surplus tanks for what it cost."

"Why? What's in it?"

The doctor said, "About forty-thousand dollars worth of radium."

A POLICEMAN'S GIFT TO HIS CITY

The biggest cross in the world stands on a hill overlooking Sault Ste.Marie, in Canada. It is a hundred and twenty-five foot steel structure, outlined day and night in glowing neon lights. The man who did most to put it there is a city policeman, Mike Perepelyts.

Almost three hundred years ago, a wooden cross had stood on the same site, claiming the interior of the continent in the name of Louis XIV of France. Now that the Trans-Canada Highway link around the north shore of Lake Superior had been completed, Perepelyts felt this should be celebrated and he recruited two friends, Mike Lukenda and Bill Taylor. For three years the men and their wives worked to make Perepelyts' dream come through. They worked out their own design for a cross. The Basilian Fathers donated the site and two local firms gave them steel tubing and plating. Lukenda, a construction man, got his firm to make the cross at cost and supervised the erection himself. Taylor, a partner in an electrical business, bossed the wiring job. When the concrete base was finished there was no crane big enough to lift the 22 ton cross into place; a boom brought from Toronto for the highway project did the job without charge. But there were bills—$18,000 was owed—and they would not turn on the lights until these were paid. Theatre nights were organized, and the three men and their wives wrote, addressed by hand, and mailed 18.000 letters describing the project and asking for help. More than 1,500 contributors responded.

The cross was erected on the same day the highway was officially opened, but it was another year before the bills were paid and the lights were turned on. Pereplyts and his friends have received no official thanks but a reaction from one contributor is worth quoting. "Keep the cross lit. It guides me home when I am the same."

the watchers at the gates

by . . . George F. Eliot

THE ITALIAN FREIGHTER *Lago Trasimeno,* eighteen days out from Genoa, lay snug against her East River pier. Forward and aft, cargo winches rattled as her holds spewed their contents out to the dock. Gusts of rain, driven by a chilly wind beneath a lowering sky, swept her decks.

Just inside the coaming of the engine-room hatch, deckhand Tony Arevano plied his paintbrush busily, while he watched his enemies at their futile labors, far below him amid the tangle of machinery. He shivered in his ragged jersey as the wind whipped round the edges of the raised skylights, but his heart was warm with self-appreciation. Just look at the fools down there with their flashlights and mirrors, painfully squinting into every one of that pile of spare boiler-tubes stacked against the machine-shop bulkhead!

They were not so smart after all, these "grapplers"—these overalled ship-searchers of the U. S. Customs Service. He, Tony Arevano, lately promoted from Genoa wharf-rat to be a lugger for Fat Mike's dope

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George Fielding Eliot, whose THE MURDER OF KING ABDULLAH appeared in our February issue, again reports on the story-behind-the-headlines in this article dealing with a branch of the United States Customs Service feared by World Crime figures. Major Eliot, the distinguished military analyst and historian, is the author of several works including VICTORY WITHOUT WAR 1958-1961 (U.S.N.I., 1961)

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smuggling gang, had fooled them neatly—and on his very first trip. He couldn't understand why Fat Mike had warned him against them so harshly. All you needed was a little brains, and the right hunch at the right moment. Tony grinned as he slapped more buff paint on the steel plates before him.

The right hunch had come to Tony the night before. At least he told himself it was the right hunch. He didn't know it was just the nervous fretting of the novice dope-lugger—the nervousness on which the searchers count as part of their stock in trade, and the signs of which they recognize instantly.

That "hunch" had hustled Tony from his bunk, down the long ladders into the engine-room—where the oiler who was supposed to be on watch was comfortably snoring. Driven by his "hunch", Tony had carefully removed certain little white packages which were hidden inside several of the spare boiler tubes. These packages were now in another hiding place of Tony's own invention. And how right he had been—for wasn't it clear that the boiler-tube hideaway, with which Fat-Mike had been so pleased, had been tipped off by some informer hungry for the ever-ready reward money?

Tony grinned again, recalling Fat Mike's parting instructions.

"I'm not hiring you to think," Fat Mike had warned him. "I'm hiring you to do as you're told. Your job is to deliver that shipment. Once you get it off the ship and off the pier, you'll be all right. You know where to go with it, and you know how the man who'll take it from you will identify himself. There are only two things that can stop you. One is getting caught with it on you, either on the pier or as you go out the pier exit. You'll have to dodge the Customs patrolmen or pick a time when they're not on duty. That's your part of the job—you've been dodging cops long enough here in Genoa, I trust your rat's instincts for that. The other danger, the worst one for me, not for you, is the 'grapplers,' the Customs searchers. They may search the ship and find the stuff before you have a chance to get it ashore. If they do, that's too bad for me, that's a chance I take. But it's nothing to you if you keep clear. Whatever you do, don't move the stuff, don't try to match your peanut wits against those searchers. Some of 'em have been searching ships and catching dope-luggers before you were born. They know all the tricks. So do I. But you don't. I've picked the place where you're to hide this junk. Put it there and leave it there until you're ready to make your try to get ashore with it. Maybe your ship won't be searched at all. Thank the saints, there aren't enough of these devilish 'grapplers' to search every ship that comes into New York harbor. But if they do come, you see to it that you don't attract their at-

tention by trying to be tricky. I'm testing you out with a small shipment to see how you handle yourself. Make good with this, and you'll be in the big time. Remember—no bright ideas."

Hah! If Tony had been fool enough to follow those silly instructions, the "grapplers" would have the whole shipment in their hands at this very moment. He stole another glance at the activities below him. The four searchers working over the pile of boiler tubes were just about finished. Now two others, their faded dungarees stained with oil and red lead, emerged from the shaft alley. They exchanged a few low-voiced words with the boiler-tube detail, then started up the series of steel ladders which led to the deck. They passed within a yard of Tony, busily painting away. They spared him not so much as a passing glance. From the corner of his eye, Tony took careful note of them. He observed the tools which protruded from the pockets of their dungaree jackets—screwdrivers and wrenches for prying into the hidden places in which the interior of every ship abounds. He noted the pistols belted at their waists. He remarked the huge stencilled letters on the back of each jacket—"U. S. CUSTOMS SEARCHER"—and the dark blue caps with the Customs badges which were their only article of regulation uniform. But most particularly he noted how, as they climbed, they peered up underneath the successive platforms of the ascent, ran their fingers along pipes, snapped a flashlight ray into a dark corner where a platform was bolted to a bulkhead. A shiver colder than the East River wind ran along Tony's spine, quenching his grin for an instant. These men, for all their careless air, missed very little as they passed through a ship. But maybe they were all through now—the other four had finished squinting into the last boiler tube and were coming up the ladders too. Tony's grin returned as the last of them stepped over the coaming and he heard their footfalls die away along the deck. Now it was time for Tony's next clever move.

He would get the stuff and put it right back in those boiler tubes, now the safest place on the ship. But he must move fast, before one of the engineers came poking down below. Picking up brush and bucket, he swung himself to the grating that gave acecss to the upper deck. He stood perfectly still for a moment, listening.

The winches still rattled. Longshoremen shouted, descending cargo nets thumped on the pier. The confused roar of South Street's traffic, only a hundred yards away, made a backdrop for all this racket. But Tony's sharp ears could detect no nearby sound, nothing at all to indicate that anyone was moving on the superstructure just outside the hatch. All he could see from where

he stood was the rain spattering along the roof of the pier shed.

He stepped out into the wind and rain. And froze in his tracks in sudden terror, the paint bucket all but slipping from his hand.

A big man in dungarees and a blue cap stood within five feet of him, probing with a flashlight's ray into the canvas-shrouded interior of a lifeboat.

Hearing Tony's quick intake of breath, the man swung sharply round. His steady gray eyes narrowed a little. He put the flashlight in his pocket and took out a folded paper printed in rows and columns of purple duplicating ink.

"What's your name?" he asked in passable Italian.

"Tony Arevano," Tony managed to say.

The gray eyes ran down the list, stopped, lifted.

"I'm a Customs officer," the big man said. "Have you declared here on the crew's manifest all the articles which you are bringing into the United States? Five yards of silk dress goods and a gallon of wine? Is that correct?"

"Si, signor," said Tony, his mercurial self-esteem rebounding. Stupid questions. As though he'd tell this fool anything else. Why, this was as great an imbecile as the dolts of the *Sicurezza* back in Genoa, whom Tony Arevano had so often bilked—except a couple of times when they'd just been lucky.

"All right," said the Customs man. He carefully folded the damp list and returned it to his pocket, walked aft and disappeared down the ladder that led to the well-deck. He seemed to have no further interest in the lifeboat.

Tony grinned. No one else was in sight. No engineer had gone below. Opportunity still smiled, if he was quick.

He strolled past the lifeboat and came to the open, buff-painted cowl of a huge engine-room ventilator. He began to paint its cavernous interior. Presently he was leaning well in, as though to reach the farther surfaces. Looking down the tube of the ventilator, he could see a glitter of light from the engine-room, filtered through the grating which, some two feet below him, was designed to prevent wind-driven objects from falling down the tube. He could just make out the little wire hook which he had placed there the night before. It was still attached to the grating. Tony cast one glance over his shoulder. No one there—just the eternal rain splashing on the deck-plates. Now he must risk a fast move, without stopping for caution. He set aside his paint bucket, reached down, caught hold of the grating, tipped it up with one hand while he released the wire hook from its underside with the other hand. To the hook was attached a cord. He drew the cord up, something bumping gently against the side of the ventilator tube as he did

so. His fingers reached and gripped a cloth-wrapped package—wrapped, to be precise, in one of Tony's sweatshirts. He came erect quickly. Five minutes' fast work, now, and all would be safe. He turned to dive for the engine-room ladder.

The big man in dungarees with the steady gray eyes stood watching him, barring his path.

"Have you declared the article you have in your hand, Arevano?" the man asked in his quiet voice.

Tony could only gibber at him, unable to produce a coherent sound.

"I'll have to ask you to let me examine that package," the Customs man said, still quietly. He held out his hand. Tony, in panic, started to dodge around the ventilator, seeking flight. Two more of those impassive dungareed figures stood by the head of the deck-ladder. Strong fingers gripped his shoulder, spun him back against the rail.

"Hand it over!" the quiet voice bade him, and now there was a rasp of command in it. . . .

"Just a punk trying to use his lame brain to think with." Inspector William Geary was reporting to Deputy Collector Herman Lipski, Chief of the Customs Enforcement Division of the Port of New York. "He had this eleven ounces of heroin hung down a ventilator shaft on a string—can you imagine that, boss?" Geary went on disgustedly. "Just about the oldest dodge in the dope-smuggling racket. They used to do that back in '28 when I first came on the searchers. Of course Rorke spotted it right away—within five minutes after we first went aboard. But we wanted—" The big gray-eyed Inspector stopped, glanced at Tony Arevano, who drooped at the office rail between two of the port patrolmen of Geary's squad.

"Yeah," said Lipski, reading Geary's unspoken thought. "Take him away, Rorke. Get him out of my sight—he makes me sick."

The handcuffed Tony was removed—to contemplate in a cell of the Federal House of Detention the consummate wisdom, after all, of Fat Mike's orders.

When the elevator door had clanged shut behind him and his escort, Geary continued:

"We wanted to get the lugger, o' course. We were working on a tip, as you know, about the 'horse' being ditched in the spare boiler tubes. But here was something hung in a ventilator, and the boiler tubes were empty. No member of the crew was on the suspect list—so I had a hunch that the lugger was a new man and that he'd gotten nervous and moved the stuff, as often happens. If so, probably he'd try to move it again when there was some part of the ship we'd searched thoroughly so he'd think we wouldn't be going back to it. That was an old one in '28 too, but it's a new bright idea to punks that are just

starting in the racket. That's the story, Chief. It all worked out—I waited till he had the stuff right in his hot little hands before I jumped him. Hell, he even had it wrapped in one of his own sweatshirts with his name stencilled on the tail. What a palooka."

The Deputy Collector nodded, a thought wearily.

"Nice job, Bill," he said.

But Geary shook his grizzled head.

"Not so good, at that," he grumbled. "We've got this Arevano, sure, and eleven ounces of dope that won't get into the hands of poor misguided American kids. All right as far as it goes. Arevano'll get maybe eighteen months in Atlanta. But I'll bet you a month's pay he doesn't know anything that'll be any use to us—even if he talks. He's just a lugger. All he knows is one man in Italy, and one place in New York where he was to meet somebody, get a signal, hand over the stuff and get his lousy pay. We'll talk to him some more, but we'll get no worthwhile leads from him."

"Maybe not, Bill," agreed the Deputy Collector. "And yet—every time a lugger is pinched or a dope shipment seized, the risk factor goes a little higher in the mind of some criminal 'business man' who's financing the racket. If we could just boost that risk factor to the point where it'd be prohibitive, both from the point of view of capital investment and of the rats like Arevano who do the dirty work for dirty wages, then we'd have a right to be proud of ourselves."

To do exactly that—to make the risk prohibitive—is the primary object of the Customs Service in its never-ending war to keep narcotics out of the United States. It's a war of which we've frequently been reminded by perennial disclosures about the teenage dope traffic in the cities of the Atlantic seaboard. Breaking up the dope-rings—catching and jailing the distributors and salesmen—is the battlefront where the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and the narcotics squads of local police forces operate. The Customs Service has the task of cutting off the enemy's source of supply.

For that duty, the highly trained searching squads of the Enforcement Division are the front-line troops—the soldiers who make the first contacts with the enemy. But the Customs searcher is a highly trained specialist. None of our seaports has enough searchers to search every ship that comes in from foreign ports. Some of the smaller ports, with a considerable volume of foreign traffic, have no searching squad at all, or depend on occasional searches by cargo inspectors and customs clerks. This isn't good enough, for the searching of ships for little hidden things is a profession in itself.

The trained searcher needs several qualifications.

He must have an intimate knowledge of the interior of ships, and of ship construction.

He must be exhaustively learned in the psychology of the dope-smuggler, and in the *modus operandi* of past smuggling cases.

He must be patient, persistent, capable of infinite pains, and of a steady temperament not likely to waver under disappointments, of which he is sure to have many.

In addition, the Customs Service likes ship-searchers to be men of some seniority in the service, preferably family men with a stake in the community. A man with children of his own is likely to feel quite strongly about the corruption of American kids by dope racketeers.

Ship-searchers generally enter the Customs Service as port patrolmen, detailed to guard and patrol docks, waterfront areas, launch landings and the like. In the Port of New York, a port patrolman who wants to be assigned to a searching squad must generally have two years patrol experience plus the desired temperament and other qualifications. If he doesn't measure up to the exacting standards demanded by his new specialty, he doesn't stay long with the searchers. If he does make good, after a time he can take the examination for Customs Inspector and be given charge of a squad of his own.

New York, because of its volume of traffic, has the largest searching force of any U. S. seaport. At 8 A.M., six days a week, about fifty searchers report at Enforcement Division headquarters. They change from civilian clothes to their dungarees in the locker room, where each inspector musters the men of his squad and makes sure every man has his gun, his tools, his flashlight, his angular mirror for looking around corners and behind fixtures, and his badge. Meanwhile the Deputy Collector in charge of the whole operation has been busy at the ticker where ship arrivals are reported.

Up to that moment, neither he nor his inspectors know for sure to what part of New York's many miles of waterfront the squads are going, or what ships they are to search. Fog, tide, bad weather, breakdowns and other unforeseeables affect the time when ships will reach their assigned piers or anchorages. Belated information, too, may suddenly switch a ship's name to the "hot" list.

Much of this information comes from paid informers in foreign parts. Up to one-half of the fines or forfeited bail collected as a result of prosecutions for dope-smuggling may go to the person who laid the information. The same applies to penalties and forfeitures for attempted smuggling of jewelry, furs and other articles. The Treasury Department has its own agents abroad, who work closely with foreign police departments and U. S.

consuls. Sometimes the crew lists of ships sailing from Mediterranean and other "dope-source" ports are radioed to the U. S. by the consul, so they can be checked for names of previous offenders or persons under suspicion.

On an average day, four searching squads are available for duty in the Port of New York. Each consists of one or two inspectors and 8 to 10 port patrolmen. It takes that many men to search a ship thoroughly, while keeping a sharp eye on tricky crew members who may try to switch items from unsearched parts of the ship to areas already gone over, or slip a little parcel to some visiting friend—both of which are among the quickest ways for dope smugglers to get themselves into the jailhouse. A normal search of a medium-sized ship is a half-day's work. A really intensive search may take a full day or even longer. At the end of the day, the squads report back to headquarters—traveling either in Treasury station wagons, or in Coast Guard patrol boats. They bring with them any narcotics or other smuggled goods they have seized, and any persons arrested in connection with these seizures. When a big seizure of narcotics is made, the inspector in charge reports to headquarters by telephone, so that the Customs agents (the investigative branch of the Customs Service) and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics may be promptly notified. Often a comparatively small seizure will suggest to the inspector's trained mind that a more intensive effort may lead to bigger things, in which case he asks for help. Small finds do sometimes lead to big ones—as in one now-famous case when Port Patrolman Murray caught a French sailor walking off his ship with a few ounces of heroin in a gauze belt around his waist. This led, bit by bit, to the final discovery of no less than 28 pounds of heroin hidden in bags of soiled linen in the ship's laundry.

It's big seizures such as this one which really "count coup" for the searchers—and for the country they're trying to protect. For the big seizures hurt the dope-running "business man" in the only place he really feels it: his bank account. That's why he hates the Customs searchers, whose trained powers of observation have given some dope smugglers the conviction that they're equipped with second sight.

For instance: A squad commanded by Inspector Sartino was engaged in searching a French ship which was on the hot list because she came from Marseilles, a notorious dope-distribution center. Port Patrolmen Dorney and Boyce had been assigned the engine and fire rooms as their part of the job, and they'd gone over them thoroughly without result. They'd sifted through bins of spare parts in the storeroom, tapped oil drums, combed the shaft alley, flashed

their beams under floor plates and into all sorts of odd nooks and corners. They kept at it persistently for over two hours. Nothing. Hot, dirty and tired, they stood in the middle of the engine room running over the mental checklist that every trained ship-searcher carries in his head.

"Can't think of anything we've missed," said Boyce.

"Drew a blank, I guess," agreed Dorney. He gave one last quick look around the grimy space. Then suddenly he said in an altered voice: "Now that's funny."

"What's funny?" demanded Boyce.

"That drop of oil there on the side of that tank."

"What's funny about it?" asked Boyce. "That's a lube oil tank. The leak's from the manhole right above where that drop is. See?"

"Look at the gauge," retorted Dorney. "It shows the tank as only half full. That should place the level of the oil at least two feet below the manhole. Yet the manhole leaks. I wonder why?"

Wondering why is never enough for a ship searcher. He has to find out why. So Dorney and Boyce, tired as they were, set to work with their wrenches to loosen the nuts which held that manhole cover in place. The nuts were screwed down tightly, were not too easy to turn, but turn they did. When half of them were off, Dorney said:

"If that gauge is defective and this tank is really full of oil, we're going to get a nice gooey bath."

He started turning the next nut.

Presently the last one was off, and the two searchers carefully lifted the heavy manhole cover from its circle of bolts and laid it on the floorplates on which they were standing.

Dorney flashed his light into the round opening. It revealed nothing except the oily sides of the tank. Boyce boosted his partner up so that Dorney could get his head through the manhole. His light showed him merely the viscid surface of the lubricating oil, a couple of feet below the hole.

"If there's anything in there we'd have to drain the tank to find it," he said.

"So would the guy who put it there," Boyce pointed out.

"You're right," agreed Dorney. "And it *was* leaking—leaking right from under this bolt here at the bottom of the ring." He fingered the bolt in question. "Oh-oh," he added.

"You're getting doggone heavy," said Boyce.

"Hang on a minute longer," begged Dorney. "There's a cord looped around this bolt. *That's* why it was leaking—hold fast, the cord runs down into the oil and there's something pretty heavy on the end of it, the way it pulls."

Dorney got his fingers under the cord and heaved in a yard or so of slack. Below him, he could just see a dark bulky object break the sur-

face of the oil. He pulled it up until it was level with the manhole, managed to drag it part way over the edge, oil dripping from it liberally.

"What was that you said about a gooey bath?" snarled Boyce, who—holding Dorney's body up with both arms—couldn't manage to wipe away the oil from his face and eyes.

Dorney gave one more heave; the thing in the manhole came all the way through, and Dorney dropped with it to the floor-plate. Mopping their oil-smeared faces on their sleeves, the two Customs men examined their find. It was a heavily corded package wrapped in what seemed to be burlap. Dorney took out his knife, began cutting the cords. Layer after layer of oil-soaked burlap he pulled off, came at last to wrappings of rubberized cloth. Underneath those wrappings he could feel the edges of small packages.

"Get the Inspector down here," Dorney directed. "We've got something big."

They had, indeed. Those packages contained 42 pounds of prepared opium, and 13 bags of heroin weighing 8 pounds altogether. At the prevailing rate, the contents of that oil-soaked bundle would have "retailed" to addicts for over $1,000,000.

It was one of the biggest narcotics hauls the Customs searchers have ever made—all because a very clever smuggler forgot that a cord would soak up oil, which eventually would leak out under the bolt to which the cord was tied, and because a trained eye noted one single drop of that oil where no oil drop ought normally to be.

Reactions to the unusual, the out-of-place—however small—become almost automatic to the men of the searching squads after a few years' experience. They'll tell you: "I don't quite know why I stopped for another look—just got an idea something was out of line. I had to look real carefully before it came to me what it was." Or sometimes a subconsciously noted fact that meant nothing at the time will suddenly fit another fact and acquire meaning.

Consider the matter of the copper evaporator coil which Inspector Bill Geary noted in a ship's machine shop one afternoon, with a couple of engineers busily at work repairing it. It was a perfectly normal and regular thing, not at all out of the ordinary. Evaporator coils frequently need to be repaired, and when a ship lies over for a few days as this one was doing, it was quite reasonable that the chief engineer should seize the opportunity to do this necessary work. Yet an hour later, as Geary passed through the engine room of that ship, his eye fell upon the big cylindrical steel shell of the evaporator. The thought came to him that with the coil removed there was a lot of empty space inside that shell. He walked

over and looked inside—and discovered that the same thought had occurred to somebody else who wanted a temporary hiding place for some fifty pounds of marijuana.

All this is due to trained powers of observation—but beyond that, there's the curious instinct which comes to the veteran searcher as the years pass. Actually this may well come from the almost automatic functioning of mental process and habits of observation, but it can be quite uncanny in its results.

Thus during the years before Pearl Harbor, Inspector Geary spent a lot of time piecing together information about structural changes in Japanese merchant ships visiting New York. He translated the facts he observed into sketches which established in his mind the conviction that these changes were meant to provide support for heavy gun positions in case of war. As a result, the Navy had advance—and very useful—information as to the hidden armament with which, the Japs had hoped, innocent-looking merchant ships would be able to open sudden, deadly fire on U. S. submarines or other naval craft. Yet all Geary had really seen was something such as a bit of steel framing that hadn't been there the last time he'd been through a certain ship. The rest was instinct and deduction—you might call it the science of applied observation.

It's a science that has its uses in cold war as well as hot.

In recent years, U. S. government authorities have had good reason to take precautions against the smuggling into this country of atomic "devices." Technically, for a random example, there is no reason why an atomic mine should not be dropped through a hole in a ship's bottom, to rest quietly in the ooze of New York harbor until actuated by radio or by a time-clock. Such an explosion, with the wind blowing toward the inhabited portions of the city, could very well result not only in an enormous casualty list, but could make much of the city uninhabitable for weeks as a result of radioactive particles carried by wind-borne spray. There are many other conceivable enemy uses for smuggled nuclear explosives.

It is known that suspected ships are occasionally stopped before entering major U. S. harbors and detained in sheltered waters—Sandy Hook Bay, for example—which are remote from the major populated areas, while most intensive searches of their interiors have been conducted. It is also known that the men who direct these searches are drawn, in many cases, from the ship-searching squads of the Customs Service. Nothing whatever is known outside a very small official circle as to the results of any of these searches: on this subject, all concerned are completely tight-mouthed. But an awed senior official, not of the Treasury Depart-

ment, did say once in this writer's hearing: "Anybody who thinks he can hide *anything* so that those boys in the dungaree jumpers can't find it is making the mistake of his life. All you have to tell 'em is, the thing's in this ship somewhere. They'll come up with it."

Which, come to think of it, is a comforting idea in these dangerous times—except it makes you wish there weren't so few of these trained and dedicated watchers on duty at the nation's sea-gates.

AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

Cornell Woolrich's suspense story, TWO AGAINST THE TERROR, which appears in this issue, may at first seem out of place in a magazine such as this — but this is only if you belong, in strict defiance of both logic and history, to that school of thought which insists that its fictional murderers and villains be recognizably "of these times."

I say so because this refusal to admit that human nature has not changed too much is so *so* naive and *so* much akin to the Victorian way of sweeping all sorts of unpleasant things under the rug of history. . . . This urge to violence—this urge to commit mayhem, if you wish—has after all been with us since the dawn of history—as it may very well be pointed out upon the gravestone of the race. Manners and mores have of course changed with the times but, nevertheless, a murder in ancient Egypt and one of Caesare's talented people and, to come down to more recent times, some of Laurenti Beria's more trusted staff members, are all astonishingly alike when it comes to a question of what made them tick, and what made them take pleasure in their work, and there is *no* denying that they were all singularly dedicated craftsmen. . . . No?

The French Revolution was to afford many persons of this kind a very special outlet for their talents. Revolutions—whatever their motivation—however impassioned and sincere individual participants may be—so often do just that. And the French Revolution, in the course of which so much more than simply a way of life was destroyed, represented a golden opportunity for these men who in another age would have employed other means to accomplish what they did, climb to power over the bodies of their own followers.

There is therefore a rather timeless quality to the unpleasantness coped with in Mr. Woolrich's story, as there is in the other stories including Edward D. Hoch's latest Ben Snow story, in the timely article by George Fielding Eliot, in our lead story, Richard Deming's A MEDAL FOR DON CARLOS, which will perhaps remind you of recent headlines, and in THE UNCERTAIN WIDOW, another adventure of the Saint.

This month we are also privileged to bring you THE SAINT IN MODERN ART, written by Leslie Charteris and illustrated by Jean Cocteau, one of France's most distinguished living intellectuals. Cocteau, while uniquely French, belongs to no one country of course, but to the Europe that has survived through so much and which will, the Gods and the politicians willing, survive still longer . . .

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

bezique of death

by . . . Veronica P. Johns

Of course I assumed he was joking, in a nasty, macabre way. It was scarcely a subject for humor, but this was a humorless night and the setting was unsuitable for comedy.

I was standing on the top deck of the steamer *Princess Charlotte Anne* because there, if anywhere, there might be a breeze. The *Princess* was noble in name only. She was a down-at-the-heels cargo ship, the seagoing equivalent of a one-and-a-half-ton truck which had suffered indignities at the hands of many owners. She reeked of curry and imponderables, but she offered the only means of my getting to Bombay at the time I wished to be there. My friends in Ceylon, who had reluctantly arranged the sailing, considered it folly for a woman alone. They cautioned me against speaking to strangers or even stewards, stocked me with provisions, packed a delicious supper which included a thermos of Singapore ginslings, and deposited me in my

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Veronica Parker Johns (how many of you remember her WEBSTER AND THE WIENERWALZ in our January 1957 issue?) insists that she wrote BEZIQUE OF DEATH because she hated to go to the post office. When Oliver Claxton, then editor of Charm, *suggested she let him see something between three and five thousand words long she—with memories of having had to wait 55 minutes at the inquiry window for a set of galleys—agreed happily.* This *would go into the corner mailbox. . . .*

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cabin, where they advised me to remain as long as possible.

They were wise, perhaps, but not infinitely so. They could not foretell the excess of oppression I would feel in that tiny, box-like space; and the smell, how could they guess at that? The amalgam, almost tangible, of the odors of old citrus fruits, rats, salt, something with an affinity to ether which had been used tentatively to clean the place, and the curry—the age-old, antediluvian curry. It was like being shut up in a coffin with offerings selected by an enemy, and I chose the open air.

The air was still; if we'd carried sail we'd not have been moving. As it was, we plowed through the night with effort, the engines straining, the vibration like the pounding of an aching temple. Below me, on the afterdeck, the off-watch crew members were massed. A hiccuping phonograph played "Tipperary" unceasingly, reminding me that it was a long, long way. In counterpoint, some of the sailors chanted to themselves—tunelessly, it seemed to my Occidental ears. The scene was set in sepia and somehow blurred, a tawny light dulling the contrast between the lascars' brown skins and the washed-out, sun-bleached robes they wore.

As I watched, an enormous rat scuttled across the deck and, within seconds, a rifle cracked. The rat dragged itself a few inches and dropped; a sailor, with the gun under his arm, descended from the starboard railing and crossed over to the animal. He picked it up by the tail, babbling boastfully, and tossed it overboard. There was a murmur of approval from his wakeful associates, and a mutter of curses from those who were attempting to sleep. And then I heard the voice, a British one, at my elbow.

"Good shot," it said, but dolorously, not as one says, "Well bowled," at cricket. "But such trivial combat," it added.

I turned in amazement, having felt myself alone at this Olympian height, observing the microcosmic show below being put on solely for my benefit. The man beside me stepped a little bit more into the light and I caught my first glimpse of him.

He was scarcely more than a skeleton with paraffin-like skin stretched over it. He wore khaki shorts and a shirt with cut-off sleeves, from which knees and elbows were bony protuberances. He removed a cigarette in a long holder from his thin-lipped mouth, and his face was a skull grinning at me. But his eyes—his eyes didn't go with him.

They were not moribund. They were quick and darting, like a fox's, like those of a juvenile delinquent who has secret and devious meanings for the things he does. There was no decay in them, rather an ever-eager questing; one could only hope that the mind behind them was a competent censor.

His name was Jemison, or Jamison—I wasn't quite certain which, because he threw it away in that dry-as-chaff voice. He lived on the outskirts of Colombo, and he was going to Bombay to sign some legal papers. He would head directly back to Ceylon, to something—he made me feel its magnetism—which held him there. He had an active distaste for civilization, and a bottle of Scotch in his cabin. Would I join him there for a drink?

"Not," I said, "if your cabin is anything like mine." I wasn't being coy. The way he looked at me I knew he didn't think of me as a woman, that all sex had ended within him. It was merely that if his cabin duplicated mine I could not bear the thought of tandem entombment. We compared notes, decided his quarters were no better, and he left me momentarily, to return with the bottle, a carafe of boiled water, and two glasses. We sat in a lifeboat, believing that in view of the way the engines were heaving that might prove to be the safest place; at any rate, it was moderately comfortable, and the slight motion as it swung upon its davits had the soporific effect of a summertime hammock. As I sipped his Scotch, which was of the best, his speech went on like a bedtime story.

He had been to the United States, he told me, had lived for a while in Connecticut. "Jolly spot," he said. "Trim little house, fine garden. I left when the Japanese invaded it."

"The Japanese?" I repeated, wondering if the man were mad. He'd already said that he'd lived in the East throughout the war. Had the onsweeping hordes of our little yellow brothers unhinged him, made him believe they had covered the earth?

"Yes," he said. "They made lacework of my roses."

Then I understood. He meant the beetles, those irridescent, gimcracky creatures which look like things sold in Japanese stores five for the penny, innocent-seeming and gaudy, but lethal to lovely flowers.

"Filthy little beggars," he went on. "Breeding constantly, and eating the while, deficient both in morals and manners. They so upset me that eventually I spent all my time exterminating them. I'd put them into a Mason jar, I believe you call it, which was half-filled with water with an inch of kerosene on top. I used to count them, compulsorily. One day I killed three hundred and forty. You should have seen them fighting for air, scrambling all over their fellows in an effort at survival. It was exciting."

He said the last in that same dry tone, the voice of a man who could no longer be thrilled by anything, and I knew that the excitement he mentioned was not the sort I would choose to experience. Killing the beetles, evidently, excited him as a frog is stirred by an electric shock, but certainly no more dramatically.

"But it soon began to pall," he was

saying, "because, you see, I always won. Try as they would they could never crawl out of the jar; they would skid on the glass sides and plunge down, their wings and their hapless heads heavy with kerosene.

"I wonder," he mused, sucking his empty cigarette holder, "about the theosophy of beetles. Do you fancy they are Buddhists?" He chuckled dryly, and I made some noncommittal reply. "Not," he continued, "that I feel professions of any organized religion an essential to respect for death; a boy who has never read Dante may have a superior image of hell. Or should I say 'inferior'?"

He chuckled again, but I did not join in his acrid merriment. I was not liking this. In the sinister night, threading through the raucous and jaunty tune on the phonograph, his reminiscences were becoming unbearable. I tried to change the subject.

"When did you move to Ceylon?" I asked.

"I shall come to that," he assured me. "First there was Africa. Then India." He was not to be hurried, I could see; I settled back.

"As I was saying," he resumed, "to appreciate death one needs no blueprint drawn by a master. Each aware being has his own notion of what comes next, even though some believe it only to be nothingness, the end of all that is. But, alas, beetles do not impress me as being especially aware. True, they experienced some discomfort in the kerosene, but I at last decided that they could not possibly know that that would be the end of them, that life was about to cease. They no more sensed extinction than does a candle flame the second before I snuff it out.

"You asked when I moved to Ceylon. Now we start eastward. Africa first, for game. Big game, bigger than beetles. Smarter." He sighed and continued, "But the same thing eventually occurred there. Inevitably, again, I won a hollow victory; I killed, but the beasts did not know what death was. Once, face to face with a lioness, I thought I saw fear which went beyond immediate danger, a hint of the knowledge of finality, but it rapidly passed and she died insensitively.

"Then someone recommended tigers, Bengal tigers. A magnificent creature, I was told, with a nobility of intellect. So I went to India about ten years ago, my heart high with hope of finding a worthy adversary. It is no more good to kill without rapport than it would be so to love. If I were to kiss you—" I drew back, although he had not altered his position in the boat—"think how dull for me it would be if you did not know you were being kissed, if it produced in you no emotion of pleasure or of revulsion."

There was an erotic purr in his voice now, but he wasn't trying to entice me. He was in love with his topic, his hobby of creation in re-

verse. In the heat, the cloistering heat, I shivered.

"And with tigers?" I whispered.

"Same story," he stated. "I won handily, and the first two or three knew only a moment of terror but no prescience. It occurred to me that their marvelous intellects might be in low gear, that they needed some time for understanding, so I began to take chances, giving them plenty of time before I fired the telling shot. I got clawed badly once in the process, and I realized that that wasn't any good either, for the beast would not know what he had done to *me*. At best he would see me as a menace averted, at worst as a tasty meal, but he would never know that he had worked a miracle, that he had suddenly stopped all the living organism of me.

"So tigers, too, proved unsatisfactory. You could prolong killing only with a creature so small and ineffectual that it presented no threat to you. With a more formidable animal, prolongation is merely a dressed-up suicide, meaningful merely to you; in short, a game of patience. If one wants a two-handed game, a bezique of death, there is only one possible antagonist."

I didn't want to ask the question, but it formed itself without my direction. "And that is?" I prompted.

"Human beings," he said, quite calmly.

I stood up in the lifeboat. My cabin seemed the most inviting spot in the world.

"You're not going?" he asked, and I told him vehemently that such was my intention.

"But I'm just coming to the interesting portion of my story," he protested.

"You don't mean you actually tried—murder?" I said.

"But of course."

I stumbled while getting out of the boat, and his hand on my arm was shockingly cool.

"I can manage," I said. "You stay here. Don't bother to see me to my cabin. Perhaps you can find somebody else to listen to your little jokes."

"You think I'm joking?" He sounded hurt.

I did. I hoped so. We had been in almost total darkness, but the light from the radio operator's room now caught his eyes and they seemed to be laughing at me.

"Of course you are," I said, ashamed of my sudden panic. "Good night, Mr.—er, Jemison."

"Good night. And, as you Americans say, I'll be looking for you."

He didn't find me for some time. No stowaway could have hidden more completely than I. I breathed the stench in that cabin long enough to accept it as my natural atmosphere. In fact, I added the redolence of Sterno and the canned foodstuffs I had brought aboard. I wasn't afraid that Mr. J. would push me overboard, after first specifically explaining what the action would mean to both of us. At least I don't

think I was. Consciously, I thought he was a little crazy and pent-up, with a desire to capture somebody's attention. I wanted no part of him.

Three hours before we were due to dock I decided to desert my hermitage for a venture onto the fringes of society; there would be doctors in Bombay to cure the consequences of a meal in the dining salon. The food wasn't too bad, I found, and Mr. J. was nowhere to be seen. I wondered idly if another listener had taken him more seriously than I and had had him put in irons.

After dinner I went above to what was euphemistically called a lounge, a dingy little cubicle amidship. I ordered a gin-sling, and got a surprisingly good one. I sat at a table near the porthole. There was a pack of cards on it, and as I sipped my sling I started to play one of my favorite brands of idiot's delight. My bags were all packed and I was ready to disembark. I didn't have a thing to worry about.

So I'd thought. I had reckoned without Mr. J.; he stepped into the lounge and made straight for my table.

"I'm glad to see you using my playing cards," he said, and I dropped them as if they were acid. "I've been playing patience all voyage. May I join you in a game of bezique?"

I looked at him sharply. In the skull of his face his eyes crackled as breakfast cereals are supposed to do. Surely he was laughing.

"I don't play," I said, in as surly a manner as I could summon. I didn't ask him to sit down, I didn't have to. He did so, and told the bar boy to bring me another of whatever I had been drinking.

"I've missed you. Were you seasick?" he asked solicitously.

"Yes," I lied. It seemed simplest.

"Poor girl," he said. "I hope no remarks of mine contributed to your distress."

"Not at all," I told him. "You were, of course, only joking when you talked to me."

"Not necessarily," he contradicted.

I thought he might start the whole business over again and I was determined to ward it off. I looked straight at him. "Nonsense, Mr. J.," I said. "I know that you have never murdered anyone. Anyone with such a predilection for confiding in strangers could never have done so and remained at large. So please spare me any post-mortems of your bezique of death."

He looked at the table; with his lids down he more than ever resembled a death mask. "It is a very difficult game," he said. "Impossible to enjoy if one of the players cheats."

He picked up the cards and shuffled them, starting to deal two hands. "There's an old saw," he said, "that the cards never forgive. It's true. If one doesn't play them well at the first opportunity, one rarely gets a second chance."

He arranged one of the hands, frowning, biting the corner of his thumb. I got up. "I've got to see to my packing," I said.

"Of course," he muttered, from some deep crevice of thought. He didn't say good-by.

A week or so later I was at a cocktail party in Bombay. A Mrs. Heath arrived late, with the excuse that she'd been seeing a friend off on a ship for Ceylon. Such a dear man, she said, Harold Jamison.

My ears pricked at the name. I asked Mrs. Heath if that could be the Mr. J. who had come on from Ceylon a few days before.

"I'm sure it is," she said. "A slender man?"

I nodded.

"Well," Mrs. Heath said, "if he lost an opportunity to renew a shipboard acquaintance, I'm doubly sorry that I could not persuade him to stay over. The poor man does so need a holiday, but he came here solely to attend to some legal matter and insisted upon taking the next steamer back."

She sighed, in palpable sympathy. "Harold's is such a sad story," she said. "I've been close to much of it. I went to his wedding. He was a bachelor for most of his life, and you know how they fall when they do. Her name is Irene; she's redhaired and beautiful. They met when he first arrived in Ceylon about nine years ago, and it was love at first sight for both of them. They were married almost immediately, and were so enthralled with each other that they didn't want other people around. They built a cabin up in the hills, beyond Kandy, miles from anyone, and I believe they would have lived there the rest of their lives if it had not happened."

"If it had not happened?" I piped up.

"Yes, a most shocking thing and quite unexplainable. Irene must always have been a little skittish, I expect. Harold hated to talk about it, of course, but as closely as we can figure it out this is what occurred: Irene and Harold were walking through the jungle one day, searching for orchids for their dinner table. I suppose they had a lovers' quarrel or something of the sort—anyhow, Irene got the wind up and started running. She lost her balance and fell off a ledge, about eighty feet down, the deepest drop around there.

"You can imagine how he felt. Somehow he got to her. By some miracle she wasn't dead, but there lay his beloved Irene, unable to move and babbling like a child, not even recognizing him. The poor man picked her up and carried her to the nearest village. There was a rest house there with a telephone, and he fetched up the ambulance from the hospital in Colombo. For months, while Irene was in a cast, he stayed beside her day and night. About all the doctors could do was to set the broken bones and ease

her over the initial agony. When she was finally discharged she was hopelessly paralyzed and," she touched her forehead, "unable to understand the simplest thing.

"I think it would have been more merciful for all concerned if she had died, but Harold took her to a bungalow near town and has made it his life's work to help her to recovery. He keeps saying that some day she will be well enough to return to their cabin. When I left him just now he seemed almost apprehensive that she might have recovered in his absence, for he should hate to miss a minute of Irene as she used to be. God knows how the man maintains such faith, because she has the mind of a baby. A baby, did I say? It's more like the mind of an animal, unable to co-ordinate thoughts, to comprehend anything said to her. Every once in a while she looks at him in the strangest way, as if all things were known to her, and the poor man is so pathetically encouraged. He tries then to converse with her—you should hear the mad way she laughs when that happens—but then the curtain comes down again and she's as remote as ever. Sometimes you almost feel that she could help herself if she'd only try."

She was much sorrier, I could see, for Mr. Jamison than for his wife, as if she felt that Mrs. J. were deliberately being a burden, had chosen to be immobile and stupid purely to spite her doting husband. I walked away from the woman resenting her deeply, and amazed to find myself such a violent partisan of Irene Jamison. Certainly Mrs. Heath knew the pair better than I, and her estimate of the affair was no doubt accurate; I had nothing to go on but a mistrust of Jamison's crackling eyes and the brain I detected behind them, the twisted psyche which could joke about death and the pleasure of its infliction.

And then it struck me, shaking me. Maybe he wasn't joking.

Irene would have thought he was joking also, at first, loving him, living with him in the jungled hill. She might even, in the manner of wives, have found the joke becoming tiresome, but she would never for a minute have believed it, until one day he found new words and a ledge at her back to give them credence. They'd been hunting for orchids for their dinner table, pushing their way through the tangled ferns, ducking beneath the low-hanging branches, precariously keeping their footing on the slippery dark-brown soil. The green smell, the snake smell, the chattering and the danger all around, and the precipitous plunges—but beside Irene the man she trusted; until he said it believably, and for the first time she believed and knew that the gravest danger in the world for her was her husband. The realization must have startled her so that

she fell, before he was ready, down the deepest drop around.

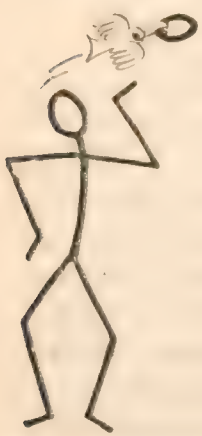
And since then what had gone on between them? He had devoted himself to her, trying to heal her body and to clear her mind so that they might return to the cabin. So that they might start the ghastly game over again?

I could almost see them, the man, and the faceless, mindless, red-haired beauty; the man shuffling the cards and waiting for the wife who wasn't well enough to play. And I thought: Irene Jamison, is that the only way you know how to beat him, to retreat into your incomprehension as I retreated into my cabin? The world is larger than a ship. You could get away, if you cured yourself.

Or (I began to wonder) is that your idea of getting even, of punishing him for the game he played before, when something in his calculations went wrong and he did not quite win? As he said, the cards never forgive; perhaps you are even less placable.

I remembered vaguely how bezique is played; in the first half of the game you draw and discard, building a hand which you play in the latter half, to the end. Kibitzing is onerous; however I must say this: although it's not the way I'd have played it, Mrs. Jamison was certainly winning.

NEXT MONTH–



ADVENTURE OF THE REMARKABLE WORM
by AUGUST DERLETH

BLOOD-MONEY
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

A PLAGUE OF PIGEONS
by WILLIAM O'FARRELL

NOTHING IS SIMPLE
by HAL ELLSON

THE SLANE MYSTERY
by EDGAR WALLACE

–in the August issue of *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

THE saint in MODERN ART

by Leslie Charteris and Jean Cocteau

I have been charged with many things at one time or another, but seldom with being long of hair or high of brow. It may therefore come as a shock to those who are inclined to rate my art appreciation at the Vargas level to learn that in Cannes last summer I attended a varnishing of paintings by Jean Cocteau.

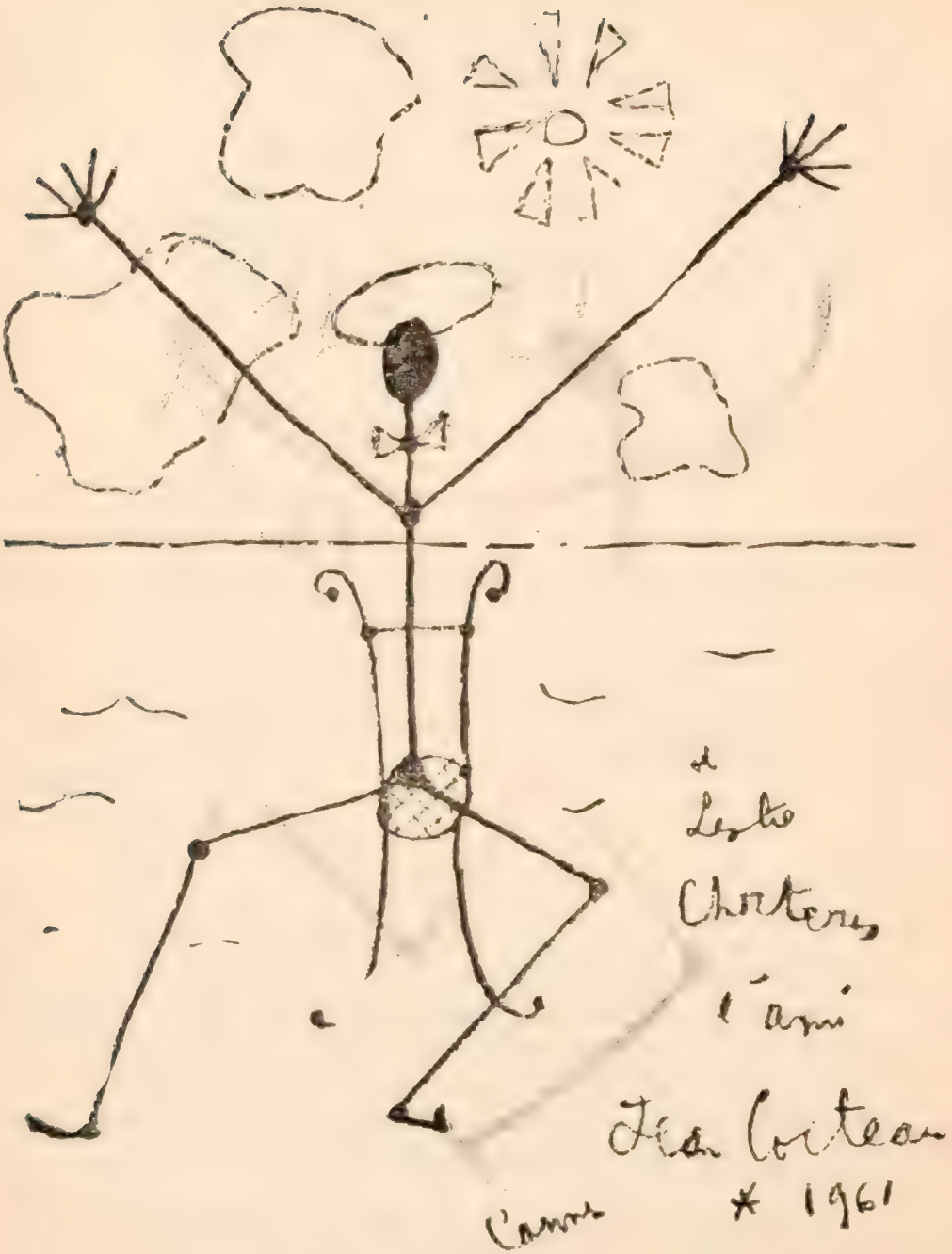
I was lured into this cultural adventure by Mario Brun, a distinguished reporter who had just interviewed me, and who wanted me to believe that he had seen a whole shelf of Saint books in the library of Monsieur Cocteau, whom he had also recently interviewed. It seemed slightly improbable to me that even my Immortal Works, being in the category they are, would attract such attention from one of France's most eminent living intellectuals, a man of such versatile genius that he has won separate laurels as poet, playwright, and painter, who has written and directed motion pictures that are still regarded as classics, and designed a French postage stamp that is still current, and been elected to the Academie Francaise, which is France's highest artistic accolade.

Even when I met Monsieur Cocteau and he admitted his predilection, I couldn't help wondering if he only said so out of his abundant charm. I therefore challenged him to draw his version of a Saint figure. And without a moment's hesitation he produced the following:

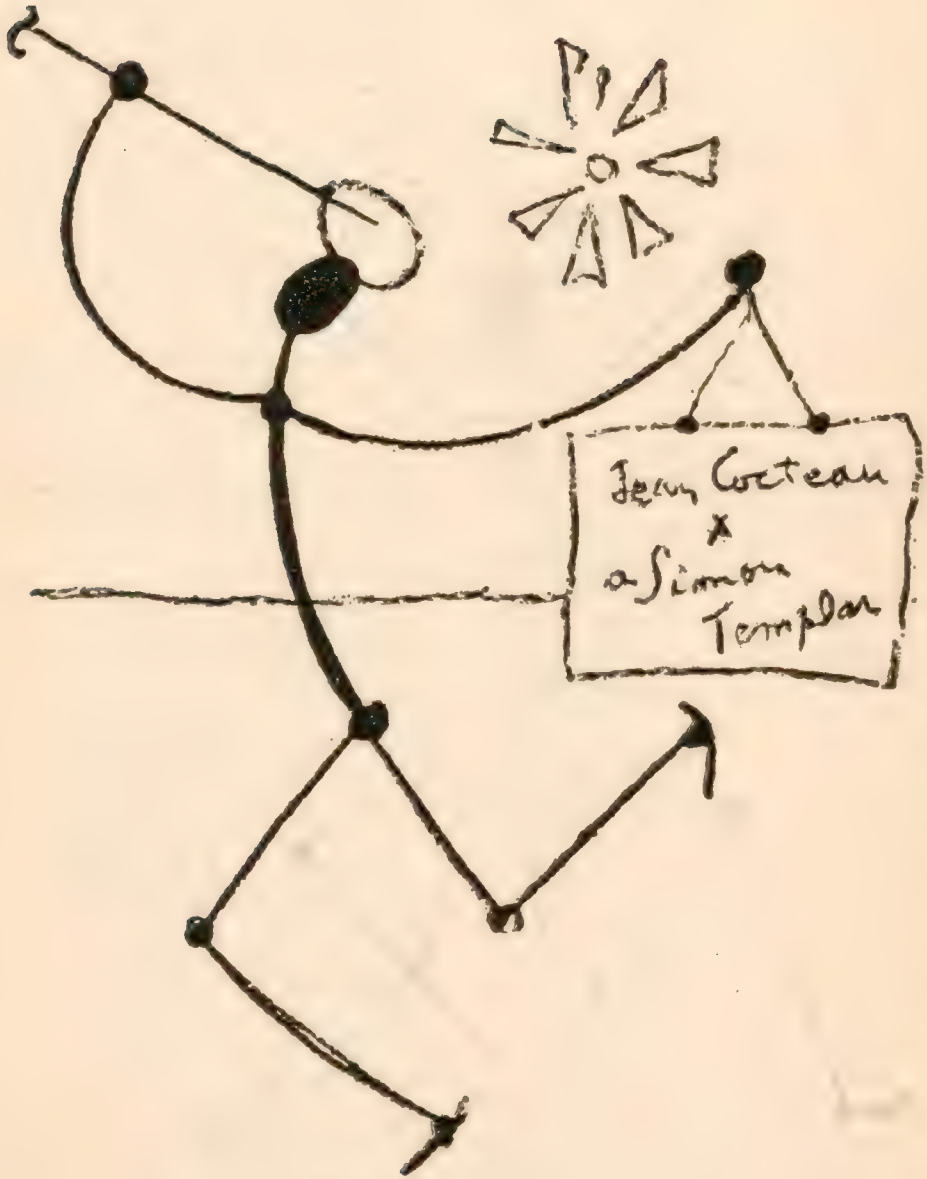
"They are not very good," he apologized. "Where are you staying? Tomorrow I will send you some better ones."

I certainly didn't expect him to remember that. But behold, two days later, I received in the mail a sheaf of variations, which I shall always treasure as evidence that those who profess to look down their noses at such tales as these may have to stand on their heads to do it.

On the following pages, you will see two samples of Jean Cocteau's hitherto least-known masterpieces.



This looks as if he saw me doing a King Canute at Cannes.



Here I suppose the Saint uses his halo for a tennis racquet.

the man with the golden tongue

by . . . Harlan Ellison

MATTHEW FARLEY had been expecting the knock on his door for almost a week. He had stayed away from work, in hopes the knock would never come, and he had lived almost exclusively from the canned goods in the kitchenette of the tiny two-room apartment, going out to shop only when milk and eggs ran out.

He had stayed home, hoping if he did not show himself, they might not know he was in this neighbourhood, perhaps think he was from out of town or something. He had stayed home, but the knock had come eventually.

It came again. Sharp and solid. Not the way he had expected it.

But then, he had expected a hail of machine-gun bullets through the door, really; the same way the man in the billiards place had gotten it. The knock seemed so innocuous.

He tried to fight down the panic that swam to the top of the lake of fear in his mind.

Again, sharper, but still businesslike.

Not at all the way a killer would sound.

Harlan Ellison, author of THE MOUNTAINS OF BLINDNESS, which appeared in our Sept. 1961 issue, is a young man who will in time be recognized as one of the important social novelists in these somewhat less than placid times. There is much of the quality of these days in his stories; several have appeared in this magazine.

"Mr. Farley?" the voice was muffled by the closed door.

He hesitated a long, long minute.

"Mr. Farley? Are you there, sir?"

He kept silent; perhaps the man would go away.

"Mr. Farley, this is the police. We know you're there, sir, and we want to be of help. Please allow me to speak to you for a few minutes." A hesitation, then, again, "Mr. Farley? Are you there?"

The police? Could it be? Why not? If the killer knew he had seen his face, and if the killer had found him, then why could not the police have done the same? He bit his fingernail and winced in indecision.

The knock.

"Y-yes?" he attempted, almost too softly.

"Mr. Farley." It was semi-triumphant. Just a slight disguise of pleasure; the man outside had done considerable searching, that was certain. "Mr. Farley, please let me speak to you for a few minutes, sir. I've been trying to locate you for almost six days, and they were getting worried at the station house. Please, sir."

Mr. Farley went to the door. He did not touch it, almost as though it were molten. He pressed against the wall beside it, his face against the mirror beside the door, his breath caught in his throat. Why had he spoken? This man might be the killer. But no—there was a faith and trust engendered in that voice. He somehow trusted the man on the other side of that door. It wasn't the killer, he knew that.

He felt the cool of the mirror against his face, and moved away. For an instant he caught a glimpse of himself. Gone to fat.

Slightly balding, and with a haircut that made him look as though a bowl had been jammed atop his skull, then sheared around the edge. Eyes that were watery blue, nothing romantic. His nose was so much puff and froth, and the cheeks that parenthesized the puff were round hemispheres. His neck was a logical outgrowth of his chin, and the two were one. He was not a handsome man; he had never been one. He was merely a man, with no great direction in life, and no great skill.

He had existed in the wasteland of passion and struggle that was the world mainly through an ability to speak. He had the gift of the gab, a golden tongue, and that great gift offset his other, unprepossessing drawbacks.

Now, he could not speak. For the first time in his life he was tongue bound. He managed a "Nuhh?"

The reassuring voice just beyond his perspiring head soothed him. "Mr. Farley. You've got to talk to me, sir. My name is Cadwell. Detective Robert Cadwell, thirty-second precinct. Sir, your life is in danger, and I've been sent to ask you—oh, what the hell!" The man exploded with a curse that was all annoyance and frustration, nothing more. "Look, Mr. Farley, I was sent

to *help* you. Now how the devil can I help you if you won't even *talk* to me?"

Farley placed a hand on the mirror. It left a soft, moist print.

"I'm—I'm a-afraid to open the door."

"Mr. Farley, sir, nothing can hurt you. I'm from the police, and I've been sent to——" the annoyed snort again. "Oh, hell." The sounds of footsteps receding.

Panic butterflyed through the water of fright and struggled to be free. The policeman was going! He had to stop him.

Mr. Farley unbolted the door, and stuck his head out.

The man stopped at the head of the stairs leading down to the foyer of the apartment building. "Hi." It was a relieved, final word. Cadwell was surprised, but pleased.

"I—I'm s-sorry," Matthew Farley stammered. "I've not been myself . . . at all . . . lately. I've not been well."

Cadwell stepped toward him. "May I speak to you, Mr. Farley." He did not use the word "sir" but it was there, and such politeness reassured Matthew more than pleading could have, even by its absence.

Abruptly, Matthew realized he was in the presence of a policeman, and his manners returned. "Oh, yes, won't you come in, please."

The man named Cadwell stopped before entering the apartment. "Mr. Farley," he said seriously, reaching inside his jacket—Mr. Farley stiffened—and pulling forth a wallet which he flipped open, "I wanted you to see my credentials before I came in. Just so everything was squared away."

Matthew glanced quickly at the tin, and back to Cadwell's face; it was a restful face. He was satisfied.

"Come in, sir, do come in." The golden tongue had loosened.

Cadwell entered the room, and swept his dark grey snapbrim from his head. He held it awkwardly, until Matthew realized it was in the man's hand, and took it. He nervously indicated the soft chair by the window for Cadwell, and perched on the edge of the sofa when the other was seated.

"Mr. Farley——" Cadwell began.

"Yes?" inquisitive, because Matthew knew he must not talk about the thing he had seen in the street.

"Look, Mr. Farley——"

"Do call me Matthew. That was the name I used when I was in the theatre. Matthew, plain Matthew, no last name; rather clever, don't you think, for a stage personage?" Matthew had never been on the stage.

"Well, then, Matthew. But look, Mr. Fa—Matthew, I came here at the request of Lieutenant Foote, he's in charge down at the thirty-second, sir."

Matthew smiled politely at this intelligence, anxious to say something. Anything. It had been six days since his conversational abilities had been demonstrated; it was good

to feel relaxed, and be able to just *speak* to someone again.

Cadwell went on. "Matthew, five days ago, a man named Ricci was killed a block from here, in a pool parlour. He was the collector for a horse book that we've been trying to track down for almost a year now. He was killed because he had been keeping back some of the take. Do you know anything about that killing, sir?"

His eyes knew what the answer should be, and his voice asked Matthew to tell the truth.

Matthew lied; he did not want to die.

"Killing, Mr. Cadwell? I'm afraid not. You see, since I left the theatre, I haven't been too well. It's all I can do to get down to the office every morning. I work for——"

"Yes, Mr. Farley," Cadwell interrupted impatiently, frustration in the sound of his voice and the lock of his big hands, "I know. I know you work for the Better Business Bureau, and I know you are forty-one years old, and I know you have a heart condition. I know all of these things because I've been searching for you for six days.

"And I've been searching for you for six days, sir, because a beat cop at the corner of Third and Seventieth saw you near the scene of that killing. I'm not here by chance, Mr. Farley.

"Now. Will you please tell me what you saw, sir."

Matthew's plump left hand found the slight indention where neck and jowl emerged, and stroked that indention with unevenness. Softly, ashamedly, he murmured, "I know nothing."

"Excuse me, sir, I didn't hear what you said."

Louder: "I said, Mr. Cadwell, I know nothing."

Cadwell leaned forward, persuasively pleading. "Mr. Farley, there's more at stake here than just the apprehension of a killer. This city has to be clean, sir. It has a great *need* to be clean. You can't know what it is, to work as a cop all your adult life and see the filth that's all around you, and *want* to clean it out, yet find yourself helpless. Mr. Farley, it's a terrible thing."

"What do you want from me!" Matthew exploded, his golden tongue annoyed at the other man's eloquence. "I'm a peaceful man; I detest violence and crime as much as you. All right, so perhaps I'm *not* a great hero, but if I knew something, I'd tell you. No. I know nothing. Leave me alone." He wished feverishly, within himself, he had never opened that door. He hoped the killer would not use this to track him down.

Cadwell stood up, and anger flamed in his face. "Mr. Farley, a man went into that pool room and used a Thompson submachine gun in a space not much bigger than this apartment. Not only did he cut in half a slob no better than himself, but he wounded three other men,

neighbourhood hang-ons who were minding their own business, shooting a game of snooker.

"That man might have killed people on the street if he had been pressed, Mr. Farley. The next time it might be someone's wife or children. Can you go to bed at night with *that* on your con——"

"I can't worry about that, Cadwell," Matthew flared. "I can't worry about anything or anyone but myself.

"That may sound self-centred," he was apologetic, but firm, "but no one has ever looked out for me. I've had to go it myself all the way. I have no one to hand me anything and say, 'Take it easy, Matthew, just settle back and rest.' No, Mr. Cadwell, I know nothing, and if I did, I would still keep my mouth shut. Now that's it! Get out now, and leave me alone!"

He rose and went to the other window. He clasped his pudgy hands behind his back, and stared at the street below.

He heard Cadwell rising, snapping his tongue against his teeth.

"You're a weak excuse for a human being, Mr. Farley. A weak, weak excuse." Matthew heard the hat being slid from the table where he had placed it. "I can't say it's been a pleasure, Mr. Farley."

Matthew did not turn round. "I'm sorry. That's the way it is. I saw nothing. I'm sick, go away and leave me alone."

"You know we may call you, subpoena you if this ever gets to trial—which it probably won't, now that we've lost our only witness. . . ."

Matthew stiffened, and a picture ran through his head.

"You know, Mr. Farley, there's a legal phrase that might interest you. It's called *pari passu,* which means without preference. If this comes to court, they'll get you for withholding evidence. You'll go to jail yourself——"

The picture in Matthew's mind was of himself, on the witness stand, dapper in a double-breasted dark blue suit, with a four-in-hand tie and his hair—with the bald spot covered—combed straight back. Himself, talking.

The golden tongue.

For the first time, the centre of attention. Not a clerk in the Better Business Bureau, not a fat little man who talked too much, but a material witness. His picture in the papers, important men listening as each golden word fell from his lips. It was a picture to envision, a thing to be desired. He turned from the window.

"——but if you know nothing," Cadwell finished resignedly, "then you know nothing. Goodbye, Mr. Farley." He turned to the door.

"Wait!"

Matthew's hand was palm forward, his face alive for the first time in a great long while. "You, you say this might be a big case?"

Cadwell's face showed renewed

interest. "Why, yes, sir. It would be the biggest thing to hit this city since Leggever and his bunch were broken up years ago. Do you think you'd change your mind?"

Matthew's decision was made in an instant. The cleanliness of the city did not matter to him; the truth of it all, and the rightness of it all did not matter. None of it mattered, but being able to *speak*, and be heard, for the first time in his life, *that* was something that mattered.

"Yes. Yes, Mr. Cadwell, I'll talk. Take me down to your precinct to see your Lieutenant. I'll tell him what I saw. It was a short man with a scar on his nose. He was wearing a——"

Cadwell was shaking his head. Sadly, slowly, shaking his head.

"Killing is so unnecessary, Mr. Farley," he explained. "It is to be avoided as often as possible. Only when absolutely necessary, as in the case of Ricci. We had hoped you would be afraid to talk, Mr. Farley. I was sent to ascertain whether that was the case.

"You had me convinced, Mr. Farley. Quite thoroughly convinced. Too bad." He drew the snub-nosed .32 from his waistband.

"They sent me to check you out because I'm a good talker, Mr. Farley. They said if I couldn't break you down, then you were a safe bet to stay alive and keep quiet. You had me convinced there, Mr. Farley.

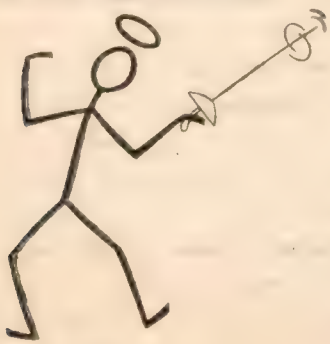
"But I guess I'm a better talker than you." He went to the sofa and took a pillow from it, placing it over the muzzle of the .32 as he walked toward Matthew.

The blood drained from Matthew's face as he watched the pillow approach.

"You know the trouble with you, Mr. Farley," Cadwell remarked calmly as he pressed the now-hard pillow into Matthew's stomach.

"You talk too much."

NEXT MONTH—



SIR JASPER UNDINE WAS A

RARE AND REMARKABLE SPECIMEN—

UNFORTUNATELY FOR HIM . . .

You will meet him in—

THE UGLY IMPRESARIO

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the *SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

two against the terror

by . . . Cornell Woolrich

WHEN HE SAW the sun gone at last, and the long blue fingers of evening began to poke into the Palais Royal gardens; when he saw the little tables being withdrawn for the night, and the crowd of strollers begin to thin out and start homeward, and the wink of candlelight began to show between the shutters here and there, Tom Crandall's long-sustained hopes were dashed at last, and he knew she wasn't coming any more.

One last time he paced about the grounds, miserable and without hope. Not disappointment alone, but a darker foreboding assailed him. If she were ill, she would have contrived to send the old woman to explain, he felt certain. What was it then?

The gardens were shadowed now; the evening star shone tranquilly above them. And it was too late to hope for her coming any more. He was nearly insane with the uncertainty of what to do next. He could not go back to his own hide-away without having seen her; he must know now. The only way,

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The time that knew the petulant-mouthed Robespierre was a time of terror singularly reminiscent of more recent and more familiar days. . . . It was a time of intrigue and of counter-intrigue, a time of considerable heroism and of a way of thinking which, in the years and in the decades which followed, many were to remember and—in time—emulate. . . . Cornell Woolrich, author of THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, PHANTOM LADY, etc., etc., here recreates those days and those nights of terror.

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dangerous as it was, was to go to her dwelling place.

He set out at last, cursing himself for not having done so hours ago. It was pitch-dark already in the street labyrinths by the time he reached the entrance to the alley. The lanes here were too narrow, the houses too high, to let the last fading glimmer of daylight through from the sky. He passed by slowly the first time, turning to look into it as he did so. Not fear for himself so much as risk of bringing down danger upon her by recklessly seeking her out ordered these precautions. The alley was empty, a tunnel of stillness. High up a window gleamed blurredly with candlelight, but it was not hers, it was on the wrong side of the way.

He turned, came slowly back again, choosing a moment when he was sure no one watched, he slipped into it. He found the doorway of her house, and in the sour odor of mouldy plaster and decay that came from it, he sickened at the thought that she must live here in hiding.

He met no one on the unlighted stairs, where he had to count his way up flight by flight in the darkness.

No gleam showed beneath her door when he finally located it. He listened for a long time. He heard talk and laughter from behind the other doors he had passed on his way up, but there was no sound here. He knocked finally, as quietly as he could manage so that the other people in the house would not hear. No answering footfall, nothing. There was only leaden silence.

Standing there in the darkness, he felt his body go weak with fear. She was gone, and in the Paris of this hour that could mean something terrible. He tried to steady himself, but he knew that this fright was justified; for Paris was ruled by mad dogs—and she was their natural prey. She was the daughter of nobles.

He stood there, head bowed, looking down toward the floor. He'd never loved before, he realized that now. He had never felt like this before. And he could do nothing; he could not hope to find her in the city's turmoil; he could only wait.

Suddenly, the fitful glint of an approaching light began washing the walls from below, and there was the shuffle of ascending footsteps. He shifted quickly over to the handrail, peered downward through the hollowed square of the staircase-structure. It was the dejected figure of a solitary old woman, creeping upward, stopping at every step or two to rest and to sob. He knew her by her black garb.

He waited where he was. Then as she began painfully to clamber the last flight, he called her name softly in warning, so he wouldn't frighten her into some betraying exclamation. "Fernande. It's me, Fernande."

She stopped, looked uncertainly

about her. "Who calls Fernande?" Then as he came down into sight from above: "You again?" She dropped one arm resignedly to her side with a little slap. "Well, come here all you want. Come looking. You will not find her."

He caught her roughly by the arm. "What do you mean? What has happened to her?"

"Cannot you guess, must you be told?" she whispered fiercely.

And that was the answer! He knew that what he had feared, had happened.

His face became a white blur in the gloom as her light fell across it. "Don't stand there. Is your tongue gone? Where is she? Where?"

"Saint-Lazare Prison," she answered sepulchrally. "Under sentence of death to the guillotine."

The room was underground and held no windows. The low ceiling was mottled green in patches with age-old damp. The floor was blocks of stone. The doorway was barred with iron, and on the outside, at the foot of the stone steps that curved down from above, a guard with a musket over his shoulder paced endlessly back and forth. There was sufficient food and wine on the long planks stretched above casks that formed the dinner-table, but it was coarse and simple, served in earthenware and wooden platters. And those who were dining together were shabbily and incongruously attired.

It was the common-room of Saint-Lazare Prison, in which the prisoners, men and women alike, came together twice a day: in the mornings to hear the role call of the condemned, and in the evenings —those who had survived until the next day—to have their meal together.

Philippine de Sancy was seated midway along the table—for etiquette ruled here as rigidly as it ever had at Versailles, and those of greatest rank were toward the head of the table, and those of lesser rank were restricted to the foot of the table—between a youth of twenty-two, a mere boy, and a corpulent roué of sixty, who kept up an incessant ogling and made clumsy attempts to arrange a rendezvous—in a place where the only rendezvous was with death.

She stood him as well as she could, laughing all the while, but she determined none the less to make sure, if he survived another day and she did too, that she had another seat and another neighbor at tomorrow evening's board. But at least he served to keep her mind off her present pass.

"De Sancy! Philippine de Sancy!" called a harsh voice from outside the bars. "Someone to see you."

Philippine looked around. Fernande was standing there with her face pressed close to the barrier, peeping through at her with streaming eyes. Philippine jumped up, ran over with an exclamation of de-

light, and they embraced as best they could through the bars. Then the girl drew slightly back again in alarmed afterthought. "You too, my poor Fernande?" she asked ruefully.

"No, I come on a visit."

"They allow that? It's the first I know of it—"

The old woman turned to the guard who had accompanied her down. "Am I not allowed to enter?"

"I have no order—"

"Read them on this special entry-permit, then," snapped the old woman, producing a document. The gate was opened for her and she came in, drawing the prisoner out of earshot into a secluded corner.

"Did you take back my reply to Dunot?" Philippine whispered eagerly. "What does he say? Have you an answer?"

"Yes, but not on paper. It is too dangerous; after all, he works for the Committee of Public Safety and you are a condemned aristocrat. I bring it by word of mouth. His head is turned like a schoolboy's at the thought that you consent to accept his offer of 'protection'."

"Canaille!" the girl said scornfully, deep in her throat.

"The answer is: 'Tomorrow night!' Tomorrow night he sends for you on the pretext of questioning you further. You are to be taken to his private apartments. Once out of here it will be easy for him to pretend there has been a miscarriage of justice, drop a word to Fouquier-Tinville himself and have your name canceled from the death-list. Of course, in return for that, he expects you to accept the shelter of his roof—"

"Yes," said the girl bitterly, "until he tires of me and a new face comes along. Then he'll throw me back into the tumbril! Two can play at that game of double-dealing, don't forget. I'm only using him to get out of this living tomb. Once I'm on the outside, my American will do the rest."

"But how can *he* be of help? He's wanted by them, too, there's a price on his own head."

The girl tossed her head defiantly. "He's in love with me, and I am with him. And love has courage enough to do anything. The angels are on its side. Listen to me, my Fernande. Go find him. Tell him they're taking me to Dunot tomorrow night; that at midnight I shall be alone in his apartments. The rest I leave to him, he'll know what to do. Now, hasten; go to the Palais Royal gardens, look about carefully, and you'll see him there. It used to be our meeting place before my arrest, and I have no doubt he goes back there still, hoping for some word of me. And on your life, be careful."

The faithful old woman, who had been her nurse in childhood, gave her a look of affection, stooped suddenly and kissed her hand. "God

will watch over you, my baby. You are too beautiful to die."

"Or too much in love," the girl said with a faint smile, "to want to just yet."

She was pacing back and forth, alone at the far end of the room, the next evening, when an elderly nobleman named Villeneuf, after watching her for some time, at last approached her. "Something troubles you, my child," he said sympathetically. "I have no wish to intrude, but if it will ease your mind, consider me a father as I would you a daughter. You could not touch your food tonight, your mind strayed, you did not keep it on the conversation; I do not like to see you thus."

"I know they think I'm a coward, they think it is fear of approaching death that has affected me in this manner. But it is not that, I ask you to believe me."

"I know it is not that. It is some plot to free you that is afoot, and as the moment approaches the suspense becomes unendurable. Isn't that so?"

She looked at him in surprise. "How did you guess?"

He shrugged. "The way you whispered with your serving-woman in the corner last night, these messages back and forth during the day—"

She hesitated, then blurted out: "in a few minutes they are coming to lead me to Dunot's house. What pretext he will give the prison officials here I don't know, but he is of the Committee of Public Safety, he is their superior and they cannot refuse his order. And my courage fails me."

"But why are you being separated from us at this hour of the night?"

She hung her head. "Because I wrote him, this Dunot, accepting his offered protection, in return for my life. There is a young man I love—an American—and I have hopes that—but now that the moment is at hand, I feel as if an abyss were opening at my feet. I don't know what to do."

He looked cautiously around, lowered his voice. "Take courage, don't be afraid to go to the rendezvous. Assuredly you will be led forth on foot by no more than one or two guards, and undoubtedly he will attempt to free you on the way between here and there. Can you not see that?" He patted her hand between his. "Have confidence in your young man, Philippine. You will live. You will escape. And so certain am I of this, I am going to give you a parting gift, a dowry that will help make your fortune more comfortable once you succeed in crossing the frontier. Take this."

Keeping his back turned, to the rest, he fumbled in his shirt and brought forth a little soiled ball of rag which he pressed into her hand.

She opened it slightly and peered at what was hidden in it. It was a diamond of almost incredible size

and sparkle. She quickly covered it again, tried to pass it back to him. "But this must be priceless! Oh, monsieur, I cannot."

He warded it off. "It is of no use to me, little Philippine. I am an old man. I am under sentence of death passed by a far greater tribunal than theirs—the laws of mortality.

"I have had it hidden in my cell, under the straw," he went on, "since I have been here. It was all I had time to take with me, of our family jewels, when they came to arrest me. I only brought it along to buy my own daughter's life with it, but before I had a chance to do anything, they called her name and took her away in the tumbril." He sighed. "Eighteen years old. I have had no further interest in it since then."

They had been so taken up they had not seen the soldiers come down the steps. A harsh voice rasped through the bars: "Citizeness de Sancy, small— named Philippine. Daughter of an aristocrat, and of an aristocrat's wife, and therefore an enemy of the people. Stand forth for removal!"

Keys clashed, and an arm curtly beckoned her out.

She hastily thrust the object Villeneuf had just given her down the bosom of her dress, and turned a stricken face toward him. She clung to his coat with both hands in panic, desperately unwilling to go.

He gently disengaged them, stroked them like a father, to calm her.

"Pray for me, m'sieu!" she said in a voice that was almost a sob.

He kissed her benevolently on the forehead, then put his hands upon her shoulders and gently turned her toward them, at the same time inclining his own head a little to murmur close to her ear:

"Have courage Philippine, little frightened girl. Go forward and face your fate. If it is to live, then your fears were a waste of time—and you will know it after. If it is to die, then your fears were a waste of time—and you won't know it after. That is the only difference. I sometimes think that the finest thing there is in life—is death."

He was at a large desk, Dunot, quill in hand, making great show of being busy at a vast litter of papers. She had an impression, though, by the disturbed slant of the drapes at the windows, that he had been at them more than once, peering forth to watch for her arrival. He had been having some experimental traffic with pomades and cologne-water in expectation of her coming, judging by the aromatic welter that emanated from his poorly-shaven jaws and dank hair. There was brandy in it somewhere, too.

He did not look up for an instant or two, then when he did, it was at the subaltern, not at her.

"Well?"

"The commandant at Saint-Lazare ordered me to bring this woman before you."

Dunot riffled the papers before him, as if in search of the pertinent document. "Here it is. Ah yes, I remember. A reexamination of the charges on which she was arrested and tried. You may leave her here in my custody." Very business-like, still without seeming aware that the subject of discussion was present in the room at all. "Report back to your commandant that your mission has been discharged. I will turn in my findings direct to the Committee myself, and of course be responsible for the prisoner's safekeeping until final disposition is made of the case." And to her, brusquely and still without looking at her, "Sit down, prisoner, until I am ready to attend to you."

She lowered herself uneasily to the very outermost edge of the chair, stiff as an automaton. The subaltern remained standing there questioningly.

The preoccupied Dunot looked up at him. "Well, what is it?"

"May I have a voucher acknowledging safe-delivery of the prisoner? I do not want to be responsible, citizen."

"You want a receipt, is that it? Here." Dunot scrawled out something, handed it to him. The man saluted, turned and left the room, not without a sidelong glance at the girl and a knowing grin. Her face flamed and she thrust out her chin, but she kept her eyes lowered.

The door closed. Dunot raised his head now, sat there looking at her intently across the desk. Her heart seemed to swell until it impeded her breath. He spoke at last. "Well, how did you like Saint-Lazare?" She looked at him without answering.

"Well, at any rate—" He made a gesture of dismissal. "It is better to be here than Saint-Lazare, isn't it?"

The outer courtyard gate clashed distantly shut after her departing escort. That, apparently was what he had been waiting for. He threw down the quill he had been fiddling with, stood up, came out from behind the desk, and planted himself before her. "A drink," he suggested, "to take the prison chill out of your little bones?"

She managed to nod her head affirmatively. Anything to gain time. Though what was the sense of playing games out any further? She was cooped up in here now, beyond reach of Crandall, and in a far worse pass than she had been in the prison. She kept playing for time, touched her lips to the wine he poured for her, while his shadow fell across it, poisoning it. His hand dropped to her shoulder.

She shrugged it off, but almost unnoticeably so, dipping so that the paw seemed to fall of its own weight. It dropped only to a more familiar position; clasped her clums-

ily about the waist and drew her to her feet.

She stepped back beyond it. Seizing any excuse, the first that came to mind, she said in a quick, panting voice: "I am ashamed of these rags I wear; I wish you could see me at my best." And eyes desperately roving the room, "There is, I suppose, no hope of making myself more presentable—for you?" She practically had to force the last out through her teeth, but he was no connoisseur of nuances.

The idea seemed to flatter him. "Barmaid or marquise, you are all the same. You must deck yourselves out for us. Well, go inside then, if you must." He motioned toward a gilt and white door leading to the next room.

She threw him a watery smile to ward him off, a hasty "Give me just a moment at the glass," and closed the door full in his face. The gesture was enough to deter him for the moment. She could hear the ring of glass as he poured himself another brandy.

She distractedly looked about her, like something wild trapped in a snare. It had been a boudoir, when all this place was one vast mansion. Candles were lit in readiness—and she thought of a funeral and worse, at what they indicated. His red Phrygian cape stood on an old wig-rest.

But she had eyes only for that deep-set window embrasure covered only by two interfolded velvet drapes. Even though it looked out only on the same locked, guarded inner courtyard they had just led her through, anything was better than remaining passive here awaiting the ominous turning of that doorknob behind her. The sentry had a musket, after all; if she seized it suddenly before he could guess her intent—

She hastened toward the drapes with an audible sob. "Oh, if Crandall were only at hand—"

"I am. What did you think, I'd be very far away?" A hand thrust through and sealed the inadvertent scream upon her lips before it could sound, and then the drapes parted and he was before her eyes there, bared sword at hand.

Somehow the shoulder that had just now thrust off the touch of Dunot's hand wormed its way unasked into the curve of his arm and remained there. He pressed his lips briefly but reassuringly to hers.

"Tom, how did you get in here?"

"I've been lurking since before sundown in a vacant chamber in the other wing. I passed through the main gate unnoted in the midst of a group that came to petition one of their other great men who lodges on the premises. The window frame to this chamber was warped, luckily; I raised the latch with my sword."

"How are we to get out of here, Toam?" she whispered, standing close beside him. The foreign name sat quaintly on her lips.

"He must be dealt with first, Philippine. There is no other feasible way out but by the front gate. There is a carriage waiting in a certain lane close by to take us to the frontier, and a friend has readied false papers for us to travel under. But if this Revolutionary pig remains behind to give the alarm, that shortens our head start too greatly. It is his life, or ours."

"Deal then, Toam," she said firmly.

"Where is he? Outside that door?" A second clink of the brandy glass from out there answered the question. He went toward it noiselessly, sword swaying in readiness in hand. He turned the doorknob. She shrank back against the far wall, as if Dunot had power even yet to terrify her.

Dunot's voice sounded in answer to the swinging out of the door. "Ah, you have done at last? I thought you'd never come forth."

Crandall threw the door wide open, and as he advanced on him answered: "No, she sends her regrets; I come out to give them to you."

There was a hoarse exclamation from Dunot, and the crash of a dropped brandy glass. Then a chair went over. Then there came a spatter of running feet, as if someone were seeking to escape around the large desk, with other, faster feet in pursuit. A suddenly stifled shout for help, that died before it was born. A gasp, a heavy fall, a brooding stillness.

But she could stand no more. The thought that it might be Crandall, not the other, terrified her to the point of rushing in there headlong.

It wasn't, it was—the one it should have been. Her heart breathed again.

Dunot lay sprawled, shoulders flat on the floor, head reared upright against the side of the desk. He had already been thrust through once, on the left side; blood was seeping through his shirt. His eyes goggled downward in horror at the point of Crandall's sword, poised at his heart. The short-arm that he hadn't had a chance to use lay on the carpet a few feet away, cocked at the ready but knocked from his hand by Crandall's sword.

Crandall turned to look at her in curt inquiry. "Yes or no?"

"You be the one to say," she answered.

He drew the sword back from pointing-position to thrusting one. "Turn your head away, then. They have slaughtered innocent men and women by the score, he and his kind."

It was over in a minute, and without a sound. When she looked again, Dunot's position hadn't changed in the slightest, but the blood was coming out from over his heart now, Crandall was wiping off his sword.

She hastened about, immediately, snuffing the candles, until no light

was left but what filtered in through the windows from the courtyard. He held the outside door cautiously open, peering forth.

It was done now. They were outlaws of the Revolution. The whole nation would hunt them down. They would be torn to pieces if they were caught.

He transferred the key to the outside of the door, and after she passed through, locked the place up. They took a few tentative, stealthy steps out into the open space of the great courtyard, sidling close beside the wall. They could make out the sentry at its other end, passing to and fro against the grilled gate. Crandall had his sword held flat against him, point downward, under the coat he had borrowed from Dunot—so that it could not be seen, for Dunot himself carried none—but yet might be quickly used if called for. To do anything with a pistol would have been fatal, would have brought the whole place down about their ears.

As they stepped out of the shadow of the building-wing into the paler light of the center of the court, he warned beneath his breath: "I am Dunot taking you over to the Committee or back to Saint-Lazare, it matters not; play the resisting prisoner, so he has no leisure to note us too well."

"Sweet captivity," she found time to murmur.

He took her roughly by the arm, and as they came before the gate she flounced this way and that, so that the swirl of her skirts blurred his natural gait, which was not Dunot's. The lone night-sentry had halted in his paces at the writhing sight they made. Crandall kept his full-face turned sidewise to him, as if engaged in mastering her, so that the man got no very good look at him from the front, saw only the loosely-tumbling liberty cap.

"Open up!" huffed Crandall, keeping full pitch from his voice as if breathless with the task of managing her, "That I may get this aristo hell-cat off my hands!"

"Citizen Dunot," she wailed shrilly, drowning him out, "don't take me over there, I beg of you!"

The man drew out the bolt, swung the gate-half back for them. They threshed through cavorting as in a drunken dance. Yet his eye must have fallen on Dunot's coat in that instant. "You're hurt, citizen! There's blood on your coat-facing."

Philippine quickly took up the cue, wedging herself between them as if beside herself. "Aye, I did that with a bodkin, defending myself against his unwelcome attentions, and I'd do it again! All was not official questioning within, I'd have you know!"

The supposed Dunot pulled her after him down the road by main force, head averted as if embarrassed at being thus worsted. She made loud clamor at every step, yet

not too loud, not loud enough to bring others down about their ears. Behind them they could hear the sentry trying to muffle his laughter as he crashed the gate closed once more.

A moment more they kept at their bickering, then a turn below, as Dunot's lodgings on the Street of the Supreme Being were left behind, they stopped short, drew a deep breath together.

"One hazard less," said Crandall, "of the many we face between here and Brussels. They are not a very clever lot, this Revolutionary militia."

"Where was it to wait?" she asked.

"A few turnings below here, in a dark lane beside the former Convent of the Carmelites. The building is untenanted now, and windowless as well, so the carriage's long halt there will be safe from observation. We travel as Etienne and Juliette Carpentier, husband and wife, of the tradesman class. I beg you to forgive the liberty."

"It is indeed a liberty," she murmured as she hurried along beside him. "But you could make amends easily enough in Brussels. The churches are still open there."

He nearly halted in his tracks with joyous surprise. "Philippine, you mean you really would—?"

"First the carriage," she said demurely. "One bridge at a time."

It was there, in the darkness of the narrow street, standing close up against the wall. A figure that must have been watching for them from a doorway suddenly stepped forth and startled her so that she shrank against Crandall.

His face was shadowed by his hat and Philippine couldn't make it out; the voice was that of a cultured man, but he spoke with a trace of foreignness like Crandall himself did. "I almost gave you up for lost. Twice the watch has come up to question us, and I bought them off. An assignation with a lady, I said. Here are your papers—the signatures are forged, but they're not likely to detect that at a hasty glance. Most of these Revolutionary officials can scarcely write their own names. Don't say, when you're questioned, your destination is the frontier. Any mention of that wakes their immediate suspicions these days. You and your 'wife' are going to her dying mother's bedside in some country town; that is your story, that will explain your leaving Paris at this hour of the night. As you know, the city gates are closed after sundown to all ordinary travelers.

"Relays of fresh horses await you twice, at Amiens and again at Valenciennes; I sent a man out ahead this afternoon to make the arrangements. The coachman is dull-witted, but to be trusted. Do you know of some inconspicuous village lying toward the border you can name as your goal if pressed?"

"No," Crandall admitted. "Do you?"

"Unfortunately I am not familiar with the north country. Invent one then, that will be safer."

Philippine's hand strayed to her bosom, where Villeneuf's diamond lay concealed. "Grandpierre*," she improvised at random.

"Good enough, that will do. Now Godspeed to you both."

Crandall gripped him gratefully by the arm, without a word. Then he helped Philippine up and followed her into the carriage.

A whip snapped, the horses started up, and they lumbered off through the narrow passage, scraping the walls. The long journey had started.

There was a hooded travelling-cloak for her on the seat. She donned it and hid the garb she had worn at Saint-Lazare, though this last was no characteristic uniform. Crandall took off Dunot's green coat, which he had put on over his own, rolled it up, opened the door slightly, and watching his opportunity, thrust it out upon the roadway behind them. Then he snatched the liberty-cap off his head with a chin-pucker of indignant disgust.

"Don't ask me to keep that on another minute," he said, irritably scratching his fingers into his hair. "It's not politics I object to, it's its population!" He threw it out after the coat and vigorously brushed his hands out the door.

"Who was the man who did so much for us?"

"An American, like myself, whose sense of fair play makes him run these hazards. I met him by chance, and he knew me by my accent for a fellow-countryman. Who he is, even what his name is, I know not. But there are brave men in every age whose names never reach the page of the history-book."

"I'll say a prayer for him each night I live," she vowed.

"One thing he said to me, I now recall. 'It was not this *canaille* who shed their blood for us in our own revolution awhile back, it was these very aristocrats they now hunt down like animals. Is it not our turn to help them if we can?' "

"I never thought of that," she murmured. "It is so."

A smart fifteen-minute gallop brought them to the gate leading out to the Compiegne road. She shrank closer to him as the vehicle slackened. They both stopped breathing as it came to a final halt, a snort from one of their steeds' nostrils to punctuate it.

A moment passed, drawn out long as the wool for a housewife's knitting. Then a sergeant emerged from the guardhouse. A lantern splashed the black air with thin orange blood. A second man appeared, a third. The outside of the carriage became a pyre, as though phantom flames were licking at it.

* "large stone".

The door was roughly jolted open, and scowling faces looked in at them in the ruddy corruscation.

"I have special authorization here from Fouquier-Tinville." Crandall spoke a name high up in the Revolutionary ranks. "It's a matter of life and death, citizen."

Eyes peered at the paper suspiciously, while not a breath stirred within the carriage.

"Is that Fouquier-Tinville's writing?" one man asked the other uncertainly. "It dances so in this flickering light I can't be sure; it won't hold still at all."

The second one scratched his chin, his crown, the back of his neck, anxious to show superior knowledge when thus deferred to, but plainly unable to.

Crandall smote at his knee in a feigned huff, turned exasperatedly to the girl shrinking against him. "Did you ever see the like of this? They don't even know the great patriot's signature! Were I to tell him of this—"

This hypnotized the undecided one who had done the scratching into belief, though he knew no more than before. "It's his, all right," he now confirmed, handing it back. "I recognize it now. Don't you recall that proclamation we had to put up the other day? It was alike to this."

"Is it still affixed? Go and match them against one another," ordered the sergeant. "It will take but a moment, and it's best to be doubly sure."

Crandall could feel Philippine's form shudder against his own, as the man strode off on his errand with one of the two lanterns. He reached for her hand, pressed it encouragingly, breathed into her ear: "Courage. Don't give up hope yet."

The sergeant was addressing them again. "What's this urgent matter that takes you out of the city at such an hour?"

"My wife's mother lies at the point of death."

"At Grandpierre," hastily interjected Philippine, keeping her face averted.

"Ho!" He threw his head back and laughed. "You are the first man I ever met to value a mother-in-law so highly!"

"Oh, how brutal! My poor Mama!" Philippine whimpered, rolling her head from side to side in simulated desolation against the turn of his shoulder.

Lanternshine ricocheted along the cobblestones toward them, a core of light like a livid egg-yolk came looming through the murky dark, and the other soldier returned from his mission of comparing signatures.

He set the lantern down, and its soap-bubble-like nimbus contracted to sharp-defined clarity.

"Well?" demanded the sergeant. Crandall could feel Philippine's nails dig into his arm, like a little mouth with five teeth supplicating his help.

The soldier gestured at both

arms' width, their document in his hand. "You remember how it rained two nights ago? I forgot that, didn't you?"

"Pitchforks," said the sergeant.

"We should have put a little frame around the *affiche* to protect it. That signature is just stripes down the wall. Completely washed out."

"It looks like the other," insisted the one who had first been asked for corroboration. Having once given it, he was loath to retract it again and be discredited.

Crandall struck while the iron was hot. He raised his voice to Philippine. "Let's go straight back and report this. In the end that will be the quickest way. We can find him at his house."

She was quick to follow the tack he had taken. "But he'll be asleep at this hour," she protested, also in a higher voice than a conversation within the narrow confines of a carriage would have seemed to warrant.

"Let them be blamed for awakening him then, not us!" said the indignant Crandall.

The sergeant thrust their disputed document in through the carriage-door at them with a gesture so hasty it might have been almost said he speared or lanced it at them. "Credentials in order," he said. "Pass on!"

"Coachman," relayed Crandall, still with an injured air, "you heard the soldier."

The traces gave a preliminary creak as they prepared to move on again.

The sergeant was now as anxious to be rid of them as he had been before to detain them. "Don't stand there. Open the barrier. Let them through," he fretted.

A moment later the old medieval city-wall of Paris, squat and bulky, had swept by over their heads and they were on the outside, in the open country, careening down the long gray Compiegne road, free under the shimmering stars. He saw her gaze up at them and make the sign of the cross with exhausted fervor.

She looked back to where the city dwindled, lantern-sparked, into the receding black masses of the night. "Goodbye to Paris," she murmured softly. "Paris, that eats its own children. Paris, forever goodbye."

Tears came to her eyes, but only briefly. It is hard to leave one's birthplace behind.

He drew his arm consolingly about her. "We're free. No more prisons. We'll build a new little Paris of our own somewhere, just the two of us, you and I."

And overcome by the strange new emotion of freedom and the familiar old one of love for her, mingled like wine, he bent his face and pressed his lips upon hers, and they melted together in the gloom of the rocking carriage.

The first outward-spreading ripple

of the alarm sent out in ever-widening circles with the discovery of Dunot's murdered body at its boiling center, overtook and passed them before the sun was well-up in the sky—hours before they expected it to. A puff of dust on the road behind them, small at first, swelled to the size of a low-speeding cloud, and then as it caught up with them burst into two streaking horsemen. The first flashed by with just a look and gesture toward them, to indicate them to his partner. The latter wheeled, drew in toward them, horse foaming at the bit.

"Steady," Crandall breathed reassuringly to the girl at his side. "This will be easily managed. He had the sword hidden lengthwise along the cushion of the seat, ready to be seized and drawn as a last resort. But he pretended to be yawning sleepily as the rider motioned their coachman to draw up, leaned down and peered in through the dusty window. The horseman caught at the door-handle and pulled it open, without dismounting. Philippine sneezed at the dust from his head-long arrival as it filtered in.

"De quoi s'agit-il?" Crandall asked. "What's this about?"

"How long have you been on this road?"

"Why, ever since Paris," said Crandall, as if to say, "What a stupid question. Where else does it come from?"

"Who are you?"

"Carpentier and wife. We go to Grandpierre."

"Papers?"

"Here. In order as you see." The special permit to pass the city gate after-hours had been discarded by now, since it had served its purpose and little people such as they were supposed to be would not have been likely to obtain such a thing.

He scanned them narrowly, handed them back. "Has anyone passed you on this road, going your way but in haste as if fleeing? Quite a large party perhaps?"

"During the night we both slept and therefore cannot say. Who are you after, still more of these damned royalists? I thought they were all swept up by now."

"I don't discuss my orders with every chance passerby," said the man gruffly as he clattered off once more. His figure dwindled in the distance, to spread the alarm ahead.

Crandall turned back to her, but the glint in his eyes was a morose one. "I didn't expect the news to be out so soon. We may scrape through yet, but now all the towns ahead are forewarned."

"They must have found him last night already, right after we left," she said with a shiver. "Maybe we shouldn't have done it."

"We had to. The first law in life is self-preservation."

At one in the afternoon they trundled into the old cathedral town where their first change of horses awaited them. And high time too,

for those that had brought them this far were staggering with weariness. The little inn where they rested briefly and partook of bread, cheese and red wine while the harnessing was being effected was agog with the news spread by the outriders.

"I saw them, I am sure I saw them!" the stout innkeeper's wife was telling to all who would listen. "At least a half-dozen galloped by here without drawing rein, just after sun-up."

"A half-dozen?" Crandall raised his brow privately for Philippine's benefit. "What did they look like?" he asked boldly, chiming into the gossip from where they sat munching.

"Well—actually I only *heard* them go by," she corrected herself. "I was at the back getting the fire ready, and by the time I had come out to the road, there was only the dust they had raised in passing. But I know it was they, it must have been! Who else goes by us here without stopping?"

He wanted to say, "Then if you didn't see them, how do you know there were a half-dozen?" but it was too risky to press the point.

As they set out again, the town faded behind them in the tawny noon-time haze, Philippine said: "This miracle of immunity continues as though an angel had us under his wing! How long do you think we can count on it?"

"As long as God wills," was his answer in the flowery language of the time, "and not one moment longer."

Twice more before evening they were overhauled by speeding emissaries of arrest, the first time a sizable group, the second time almost a full squadron. Their numbers noticeably kept growing, and that wasn't a good omen. Dunot's fellow members of the Committee of Public Safety had evidently been goaded to fury by his slaying, and they would not rest until they had the slayers back to wreak their retribution. They must have sent out squads in all directions; northward along the Channel road, but that was blocked by La Manche and ships were closely watched at all times; due east by Rheims to Strasbourg and the Rhine; southward along the Rhone Valley to the Savoy border; and south-by-west toward Spain, which was the longest and the least likely of the lot. But the road they were on now, he knew as well as they did, was the shortest route out of France, and the likeliest to be followed. Anyone who had ever successfully escaped from the Terror had done it by this road.

Again their papers were shown, again they were closely questioned —each time more closely—and again they were exonerated of suspicion and allowed to continue unimpeded on their way. They had, of course, in self-defence set back the time of their quitting the city

to the afternoon before; it would have brought almost inevitable arrest to have admitted leaving when they had, now. And they had made such good time, that anyone would have found it hard to believe they had covered all this distance in the shorter span of time, in such a lumbering conveyance.

All through the waning afternoon, the twilight, and the early hours of the night the wheels raced endlessly beneath them, bringing safety nearer at every league, every sleeping hamlet they passed through unopposed, every turning of the road. They spoke very little; they'd have all their lives to speak of this afterward, they lived it now. An occasional protective clasp of his hand on her, an occasional understanding look as they cleared the further outskirts of some little town, an occasional sip of the flask of water they had brought with them from the Amiens inn, an occasional murmured "Are you tired, *mon amour?* Lean back on me. Rest." This was the sum and total of their communication.

An hour before midnight they rolled into Valenciennes, sleeping under a milky moon, their last stop on French soil, and found their second and final change of horses waiting for them in the stable of the main inn. They roused the keeper, and sat in the corner of the kitchen, eating his hastily warmed-over rabbit ragout and wiping their platters with bread. "Grandpierre?" He scratched his head. "I never heard of it, but then I am not much-traveled."

"Are you too tired with this long riding to go on at once?" Crandall whispered anxiously to her when the man had turned his back. "Or would you rather we stopped here until daybreak?"

"Oh no, let's be on our way," she pleaded fearfully. "We're so close to safety now it would be tempting fate to delay. Besides, it would look strange to insist on two separate chambers, and yet my conscience forbids I bed down with you until we're man and wife."

"I favor going on, myself," he admitted. "It was just that I didn't want to tax you too hard."

"I'm not wearied," was her winning answer. "I ride in good hands and for a good cause; for the sake of my life and for the sake of my love."

They paid for their food and stabling, went outside and reentered the freshly-harnessed carriage, and the night-shirted innkeeper saw them off from his door, candle in one hand, stifling a yawn with the other.

All through the small hours of the night they rode the roads, and never once met anyone to stop them. All Revolutionary France seemed asleep. The dawn came up steely-blue around them, and on their right, now first revealed by its light, ran a broad sluggish river between flat banks, parallel to the road.

"Look," Philippine cried. "What's that called?"

"I don't know its name." He thrust his head out the door and called to the driver, "What is that stream we follow?"

"The Meuse," was the answer. "The other bank that you see from here is the Austrian Netherlands. We'll come to the ferry-crossing in about five minutes more."

As he closed the door and sat back beside her again, Philippine, forgetting all caution, threw her arms ecstatically about him and pressed her cheek to his, unshaven as he was. "We're saved. We're free. We live again. Ah, my beloved, *c'est fini!* It's over." She was almost giddy with the easing of the long strain. "Why we could almost jump from the carriage at this very minute, if we wanted to, plunge in, and gain the other bank."

"No need," he said with a grin, "to wet and chill yourself. Within five minutes we'll be over it dry-shod. We cannot fail this late! How can we?"

She pressed her hand to the secreted diamond. "And I might lose our entire worldly wealth," she said with an elfin smile.

"When we're challenged this last time," he cautioned, "we'll have to change our tune, of course. Instead of going toward this fictitious Grandpierre, we're coming away from it, for non-existent though it is, it would have to lie behind us now. Or why not omit it altogether? It's served its purpose, there is no further need of it. I could say I'm a Netherlander of French Huguenot descent returning to my adopted homeland from Paris. There are many such living in exile, due to their religious beliefs, since the time of the Fourteenth King Louis."

"No," she insisted light-heartedly, "it's served us too well, that little mythical town, it's brought us good fortune, it's worked like a charm. I won't abandon it now. I'll mention its name once again for this last time, to make sure the magic spell holds."

"Sh! we draw up."

In the crystal-clear morning light, first flushing now with pink, two sentry boxes stood revealed on either side of the road, that ended abruptly at the river's bank, in a flat landing stage for the ferry.

One frontier guard came forward as Crandall alighted, musket at the ready. The other stood looking on from the background. "Where do you come from?"

"Grandpierre." He turned and helped Philippine down from the carriage.

"Where are you bound?"

"Brussels."

"On what errand?"

"We live there."

"What were you doing in France?"

"My mother has been gravely ill at Grandpierre," said Philippine. "We were called to her side. Now

the danger is past, so we return home."

Crandall presented their oft-shown papers. One of the wearied horses neighed in the stillness that fell.

"In order," said the man abruptly, lifting his head. "Pass on." He handed them back, then helpfully raised his musket and beckoned to the distant ferryman to come over and get them. The barge was moored across on the Austrian side, where it had retired the night before with its last outgoing passengers. There was not much traffic *into* France these days.

The wooden-shoed ferryman waved back in answer—they could make him out plainly for the distance was not great—and began to pole his flat-bottomed craft out from the shore. It came on slowly, seemingly scarcely to move at all, but little by little it swam toward them.

They stood there alone, side by side on the landing, eyes straining toward it. The carriage had turned around and gone back by now, of course. Meanwhile they were changing the guard behind them. A detachment of two, under a sergeant, came up the road from the barracks somewhere nearby to take over duty. The four faced one another, presented arms, changed places.

The ferry was past midstream now.

One of the newly-relieved men, not the one who had halted them, the other, sauntered idly over, out upon the landing-stage beside them, to chat while he saw them off.

"I think we'll have rain today."

Crandall welcomed the overture; it took the awkwardness out of waiting with their backs stiffly turned. He scanned the sky. "I doubt it. It's just the morning mist clearing the ground."

"Did I hear you speak of Grandpierre to my comrade?" the soldier went on. "On what street there does the citizeness' mother dwell?"

There was a momentary pause for they could not very well answer, not even knowing there had been such a place until now. Then Philippine, unfrightened, smiled fleetingly at Crandall, at what she took to be no more than undue but not ill-meant prying. With unconscious gesture she touched her bodice again. "Why, on the Place d'Armes, the central square," she answered suavely. At the same instant the ferry's snub-nosed prow scuffed the French bank with a scraping sound and came to rest.

Suddenly, almost quicker than the eye could follow, the man's musket was outthrust and digging into Crandall's stomach. "One move and I'll blow you open! *Ici, soldats! On les a!* Here are our birds from Paris we were told to keep an eye out for!"

"Philippine!" shouted Crandall, trying to push her away from him. "Board the boat, save yourself! There's still time!"

The others were coming up at a

run, muskets leveled. He would, she realized, have seized the cocked weapon and held it against himself, disemboweling himself if he had to, had he seen her jump to his bidding.

Instead, she drew in closer, twined her arm around his, stood staunchly beside him. "I won't leave you. If we die, then we'll die together. I don't want to live on alone."

"Why do you think we're not from Grandpierre?" Crandall asked their captor.

"Because *I* am from Grandpierre, it is my birthplace, I was never out of it until six months ago. *There is no Place d'Armes there,* no central square. Only a single road that runs straight through. Out of all the length and breadth of France you picked for your lie the one miserable village I know for certain anything about!"

Crandall drew a shuddering breath, and she saw his head droop slowly down, as if to say, "This is the end of all our hopes and plans. This is the end of the world for us."

From long-sustained force of habit, almost without meaning now, her hand went to her bosom, where the diamond nestled. The diamond that was to have been her dowry to him, their fortune, that was to have given them security, a fresh start in a new land. But what good would it be on the guillotine-platform, when the knife was flashing down and your future was only five seconds long?

Suddenly it was out and in her cupped palm, sending out rays like a little detached chunk of the sun.

She lifted her arm high over her head and flung it from her with all might and main. It went arching out over the water, and then dropped in with a little *plop* and a tiny splash, and sank from sight and was gone.

Hands clasped disconsolately together, they started walking side by side along the long road back. The road back to Paris. The road back to death.

After the first moment or two, though, she was no longer afraid. She thought of Villeneuf's words, spoken to her in prison. "I sometimes think that the finest thing there is in life—is death."

We will always be young, now, she said to herself. We will always be in love, now. Forever and forever. . . .

diagnosis: death

by . . . James Holding

IT WAS NINE-THIRTY on a warm, rose-fragrant June evening when the girl parked her Falcon before 421 Waverly Drive and slowly got out of the car.

She looked up and down the tree-shaded lane on which the house was situated and saw no one. She noticed that the neighboring houses were far enough away to provide 421 with welcome privacy and quiet. And she felt in a vague way that this circumstance ought to be an auspicious omen.

Clutching her purse and her white cotton gloves in her left hand, she hesitantly started up the flagstone walk past the sign that said "Dr. Elijah Turner, M. D." in sedate luminescent letters. She noticed that one of the upstairs bedrooms was lighted and she saw a shadow move across its drawn curtains.

As she reached out to ring the doorbell, she sighed with relief. He was at home, then, and that was one uncertainty out of the way at all events.

But she had to ring three times before he answered the bell. And even then, she thought uneasily, he

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Widely published writer and novelist James Holding touches, in this short-short, on an age-old problem in ethics—a problem undoubtedly with us when Egypt was young and which will undoubtedly be with us for decennia to come, so long as some men will ignore their responsibility to society.

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probably wouldn't pay any attention to me except that he must know I've seen the lights are on and am aware that somebody's home.

When he finally answered her persistent ringing, he switched on the overhead entry light, cracked the door a few inches and looked out at her standing there on the stoop. He was in his shirt sleeves, she saw, a white sport shirt, open at the neck in deference to the unseasonal heat.

"Yes?" he said in a quiet voice. "What is it, please?"

"Dr. Turner?" she said timidly. "One of my friends in Summerside suggested I come and see you."

He opened the door wider. "You came from out of town? I'm sorry. I'm afraid you've had your trip for nothing. It's well after office hours, you know, and besides . . ."

The quick upsurge of distress, even panic, that he saw in her eyes stopped him in mid-sentence. She was young, pretty, well-dressed, and obviously quite desperate to see the doctor about something vital. "Please, Doctor," she pleaded, taking an involuntary step forward in her anxiety so that he was forced to withdraw a little. "I must talk to you. I must!" She swallowed. "It's terribly important."

"Well," he said at length, reluctantly. "Just a few minutes. Come in." He led her into a consulting room off the entrance hall, switching on the lights as he entered and pointing toward a straight chair. "Sit down, my dear," he said gently.

She sat down with her knees tight together and her back very straight. Her purse and gloves lay in her lap. As the doctor took the swivel chair behind the desk, she cast a distraught eye around the room, not knowing exactly what she expected to see other than the white clutter of a doctor's office. Then she fixed her gaze on the doctor. He looked much older than she expected; in his sixties somewhere, she supposed. He was thin and hard muscled and had a shock of white hair, neatly combed.

"You *are* Dr. Turner, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm Dr. Turner," he assured her mildly. "How can I help you, Miss?"

She cleared her throat nervously. Then she blurted, "My friend in Summerside said you would help me, Doctor. That you frequently helped people who . . . who . . ."

"Who what?"

She could feel herself flushing painfully. "Who need it as badly as I do."

He said sharply, "What do you need so badly?" He was surprised.

She thought it a hopeful sign that he didn't ask her name. But she found she could scarcely force herself to tell him what he asked. She squeezed her gloves together in her lap. She stammered, "Why, Doctor . . . surely you know . . . don't you? Natalie said you'd know . . ."

He looked at her now with his professional eye for the first time. He noted the pallor of her skin, her almost psychotic nervousness, the heavily powdered rash that marred her forehead just below the hair line. He didn't need the added evidence of her constricted pupils. "You mean narcotics?" he said flatly.

Miserably she nodded and dropped her eyes.

"Morphine?"

She nodded again.

"Why don't you go to your own doctor, child?" he said, clenching a hand on the desk top. "I can't help you."

"But you *can* help me," she insisted, squeezing her gloves hard. "Natalie told me you helped her when she needed it."

He ran a hand through his white hair and frowned. Pathetically, she tried to quell the growing censure she felt in him. "Oh, it isn't for me, Doctor! Don't think that I want morphine for myself! It's for my mother. She's got terminal CA and needs something to deaden the pain. Really. Poor mother. She suffers dreadfully."

"In that case, I ask again. What's wrong with your own doctor?"

She stared at him in dismay. She tried to carry on the transparent fiction by saying, "But he can't write any more prescriptions, he's fatally ill himself . . ."

"What's his name?" Dr. Turner asked.

She dropped her gloves. "All right," she said without expression. "I'm lying. I want it for myself. I *must* have it. Please write me a prescription, Doctor. I promise I'll have it filled in Chicago where the druggist can't possibly know you. And I can pay you anything you ask!"

"Pay me!" His eyes looked sick. Sicker than hers. "How much?" he asked so low she could barely make out what he said.

"Well, Natalie said you only charged her five hundred for her prescription. But I've got a thousand here." A flood of new hope swelled inside her, miraculously drowning her previous despair. She dipped a hand into her purse and drew out a bundle of banknotes. She leaned over and placed the money on the desk before him. "Here it is," she said, breathing raggedly. "Please! I'll get more, if that's not enough!"

"Do you realize what you're suggesting?" Her heart sank again at his tone. "Writing a prescription for narcotics in these circumstances," he said, "is more than merely illegal, Miss. It's an inexcusable crime against every moral, religious and ethical principle decent people try to live by! Can't you see that?"

"Don't be so damned holy, you old quack!" the girl said angrily, despairingly. "Take the money and write my prescription! I know you do it, all the time. Natalie said so!"

He looked at her darkly for a

moment, then stood up and pushed the money back toward her with an abrupt movement. "I don't know who this friend of yours is," he said harshly, "and I don't want to know. But whoever she is, she's badly mistaken. I have never done such a thing as you suggest since I began practice, and I never shall. I am a doctor, a physician, Miss, not a back street dope peddler!"

His hand took her under the elbow and lifted her from her chair. "Take your money, my dear, and go to a reputable sanitarium where they can help you cure your addiction. You'll live to be very glad you did."

He guided her quickly to the door, in spite of her protests, opened it and pushed her through. "I'm sorry, Miss," were his last words to her before he shut the door in her face. "Sorrier than you know."

When she had gone, he switched off the lights in the consulting room and climbed the steps to the second floor. He moved like a very old man, a man of ninety, perhaps. His head was bent, his back bowed, his muscular, brown-spotted hand trailing indifferently along the bannister. Six generations of Turner doctors, he thought, to end like this.

He walked slowly into the bedroom and crossed to the bed in which lay his son, Dr. Elijah Turner, gasping in the throes of an acute attack of bronchial asthma. His son held the mouthpiece of an oxygen tube between his teeth, sucking on the life-giving air. A large metal cylinder of oxygen stood at the foot of the bed.

The son raised his eyebrows, asking a silent question of his father. "It was a girl from Summerside," Dr. Noah Turner said heavily. He sat down beside the bed in a pull-up chair. "Elijah?"

A blink of the eyes told him his son was listening. The faint whistle of the oxygen leaving the cylinder seemed to fill the room.

"She wanted me to write her a prescription for morphine, Elijah. She was an addict and she thought I was you. She said you do it all the time."

Distress, fear, and . . . shame? . . . dawned in Elijah's eyes. But he couldn't remove the oxygen tube from his mouth to reply, lest he suffocate. His father went on. "When I heard you were having another of your asthma attacks, I thought I'd just come over and relieve your nurse tonight, son. And pinch hit for you with any of your patients that showed up." He spoke in a ruminative tone, almost as though he were talking to himself. "After all, nobody knows as much about this asthma of yours as your old man, eh? Old Dr. Turner. The doctor that sired you and raised you, motherless, and helped you through medical school and nearly died of pride when you became *young* Dr. Turner, the sixth in a row!"

He paused, pain carving deep furrows in his cheeks and forehead. He never took his eyes off his son. "Oh, I've been proud of you, Elijah! Proud as a peacock every day of your life until tonight. Especially proud of how well you seemed to be doing for such a young physician in private practice." His voice cracked bitterly. "Private practice! Private, indeed. And dirty, Elijah—dirtier than any other thing you could have done to disgrace your profession and the five Turners who have been physicians before you." His voice dropped. "I'm not proud of you now, son."

And in truth, there was no sign of pride left in the old doctor's face. Nor of pity nor tenderness, either. He stared at his son as though at a stranger . . . and an unprepossessing one, at that. He leaned forward in his chair.

"Some kinds of disgrace a doctor can live down and forget, and be forgiven for, son," old Dr. Turner said softly. "But selling narcotics prescriptions to hopeless addicts isn't one of them. Only death can cure such a disgrace, I'd say. What do you think?" He got a little shrill. "Do you agree with my diagnosis, Doctor?"

His son sucked on the oxygen automatically, struggling for breath, but his eyes were pools of regret, apology, pleading. He nodded.

"I can't hear your answer," his father said. He reached out one arm and took hold of the oxygen tube in his hand, and wrenched it out of his son's mouth. "Answer me when I talk to you, son."

Without the oxygen, his son suddenly twisted grotesquely on the bed, fighting madly to draw breath, gasping and choking as the dreadful strictures of suffocation seized him. He groped out frantically, with grasping fingers already blue-tipped and cold, for the oxygen tube.

His father ignored his paroxysms. "If you agree with my diagnosis, Doctor Turner," he said quietly, "we shall proceed to treatment."

He held the oxygen tube carefully out of reach. . . .

REWARD FOR A BURGLAR

Some months ago a London burglar was fleeing across the rooftops when the policeman who was chasing him crashed through a skylight. Seeing that the policeman had been stabbed in the throat by broken glass, the burglar went back and stopped the flow of blood until help arrived. The Court of Criminal Appeal has now freed the subsequently convicted burglar who had gone to the aid of the injured policeman.

too many women

by . . . George H. Coxe

Casey, number one camera for the *Express,* got red in the face, and leaned stiff-armed across the desk with jaw slack and eyes incredulous.

"A garden party!" he choked.

Blaine, the city editor, bent a cold, sardonic gaze on the big photographer and said: "Yeah, a garden party. There'll be tea and cake. You'll love it."

Casey gulped air while words got tangled up in his throat. Blaine picked up a telephone and said: "Send French in."

"Listen," Casey blurted. "I'm supposed to get a shot of Dan Marcy and—"

"That was ten minutes ago," Blaine said, unperturbed. "Wade had this assignment. He's not here so—"

"I'll break his neck," Casey growled.

"If I could only depend on it." Blaine picked up a pencil and attacked a piece of copy, continuing to Casey in a thin sarcastic tone without looking up.

"And don't throw a fit on my desk. You may be a prima donna

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to some people but to me you're just another camera." He looked up. "And don't get tough with the French girl either. She's new and she's a friend of the boss. Just go along and don't step on any old ladies, and do what French tells you."

Casey was ready to blaze, but for once words failed him. He stood there a burly, thick-chested figure in a light-weight flannel suit, hat pushed back on a mop of shaggy brown hair, peppered with gray at the temples. His rugged face was still red and beads of moisture showed on his forehead; his dark eyes were baffled, smoldering. Before he could think of any appropriate argument, he saw the girl coming towards him along an aisle of desks.

She was rather tall, neatly slender, and she wore a smart-looking dress of cream-colored silk and a floppy-brimmed hat. Underneath it her smooth young face was tanned, cool-looking. Her blue eyes had a smile in them and she looked right at Casey as she stopped and Blaine said:

"This is Casey. He'll get your pictures. Just tell him what you want." A thin grin touched Blaine's lips. "He's supposed to be one of the best so you ought to do all right."

The girl smiled at Casey, thanked Blaine, and turned from the desk. Casey's lips framed a silent curse; then he stalked belligerently across the city room at the girl's heels.

In Casey's roadster the girl said: "I'm Edith French."

Casey grunted, put his camera and plate-case on the seat and wrenched the roadster away from the curb.

"I hope you'll be patient with me," the girl continued. "I haven't had much experience but I'd like to be a real reporter some day."

Casey gave her a quick oblique glance, wondering whether he was being kidded or not. She was looking straight ahead and her voice sounded casual, but honest. He scowled at the back of a truck. A garden party! And this dame was just like the rest. Begging for favors already—and good looking enough to get them before she got through. But not from him. A garden party!

Edith French kept talking. She had a nice voice and her manner was pleasant, unaffected. If she was aware of Casey's grouch she gave no sign; and in return Casey ignored her. Hot, irritable and completely disgusted, he continued his inward grumbling until he swung the roadster into James Street. Then he saw something that made him forget his assignment and the girl.

Directly ahead a taxi was just pulling to the curb and as he straightened the wheel a man stepped to the sidewalk, followed by a woman and another man. Instantly Casey was alert. He braked the roadster, let it roll slowly forward and yanked up his camera.

By the time one of the men had paid the taxi driver, Casey had the camera ready and he let the roadster's momentum carry it into the space vacated by the cab.

"Hyuh, Dan," he called.

The trio turned abruptly in front of the ground-level entrance of the apartment house. Through the wire rim of his finder Casey saw a small, dapper man in a light-gray suit, a slim brunette in a tight-fitting yellow dress, and a wiry man with a small mustache; off to one side, a tall, stooped fellow leaned against the building reading a newspaper. Casey pressed the shutter release and dropped the camera on the seat.

"Hi, Flashgun," the dapper little man called, apparently still surprised at what he had seen.

"Thanks," Casey said, and slipped the car into second.

"Hey!" The man with the mustache strode forward to the right side of the car. "How's for the plate, Bud." The voice was casual, but Casey caught the bright points of the man's eyes. "That one won't get you any circulation."

"I wouldn't know about that," Casey said gruffly, still grouchy and in no mood to argue. "I just take pictures—and I'm in a hurry."

He eased the roadster ahead, noting the sleek black hair under the gray felt, the narrowing of the alert agate eyes, the thin scar on the fellow's cheekbone.

"Wait a minute, Bud," the man snapped.

Casey just grunted, let out the clutch and fed the roadster gas. When he shifted into high Edith French said:

"Who was the man you called to?"

"Dan Marcy. He got out of Atlanta yesterday. He's been doing a couple years for running a lottery, and I had an assignment to get him before you showed up."

"Oh." Edith French spoke softly and sounded impressed. After a pause she added: "You know everyone, don't you?"

Casey, remembering the garden party again, said: "No," morosely. "I don't know the guy with the mustache, or the dame. Or," he added pointedly, "the guy with the newspaper."

For the next hour Casey was completely miserable. Red-faced and perspiring, he wandered about a spacious lawn like a lost soul and tried to keep out of the way of hordes of women in summery chiffons and picture hats, and men in white flannels. With a thirst for beer, he drank iced coffee and ate a lot of sandwiches about the size of his thumb.

When at last Edith French had finished her notes and he had taken some pictures of the guest of honor, a swarthy Hindu dressed in a flowing gown and turban, Casey was steaming.

"How did you like the party?"

Edith French said as the roadster grooved down Commonwealth Avenue.

"Terrific," Casey groused. Then, before he realized it, his pent-up exasperation at his assignment broke loose.

"So you want to be a reporter, huh?" he asked grimly.

"Yes," the girl said simply, unmindful of Casey's tone. "If I can only make good on these society assignments."

"You'll make it all right," Casey said. "Learn to chisel. Kid other reporters into helping you on stories and giving you tips—so you can double-cross 'em. Learn how to swear and hold your liquor; forget you've got a conscience and don't worry about your illusions—you won't have 'em long. If you do this, by the time you're thirty you'll be a wise-cracking, hard-boiled dame with all the angles in your book. And you'll probably be a good reporter."

Casey did not realize how this tirade sounded until he stopped talking; then a quick sense of shame surged through him. The seconds dragged by in heavy silence until Edith French said:

"I'm sorry you don't like me."

That did it. The palms of Casey's hands got damp. Somewhere in his throat a cord tightened and he gave the girl a quick, covert glance. Under the brim of her hat her face was still cool-looking, but she averted her head and the soft muscles of her young neck moved slightly under the tanned skin. Why, he asked himself irritably, did he have to be such a heel? This girl had class. She was sweet, decent; she looked to him for help and he gave her some of his ill-mannered abuse, as though it was her fault he had this assignment. Wanting to apologize, but not knowing how to go about it, he finally found his voice, a husky, unrecognizable growl choking down in his throat somewhere, and said:

"Forget it. Don't mind me. I'm just a camera—a mug with an ingrown grudge. If you want to be a reporter, stick with it. Only—well, build up a shell so you won't get hurt too much. If I can help, let me know."

Casey's troubled gaze was straight ahead as he spoke, and as he finished he felt the girl's eyes upon him. He did not want to meet her glance yet, and before she answered he saw the police car tearing towards him.

The photographer's habit was strong in Casey. When that car swept past and he saw the five men in it, he forgot about his troubles under the lash of new interest. With a quick, backward glance, he spun the steering wheel, whipping the roadster in a U turn that brought an outraged curse from a truck driver and an apoplectic glare from a streetcar motorman as he applied brakes and sounded his bell.

The police car was two blocks

ahead when Casey straightened out. A moment later it careened into James Street and when Casey made his turn the car was parked in the middle of the block.

"Isn't this the apartment where you took the picture of that man Marcy," Edith French said, sitting forward on the seat as the roadster squealed to a stop.

"Yeah," Casey said, and there was a sharp, bright gleam in his narrowed dark eyes as he stepped to the pavement. "Wait for me," he ordered, "and I'll see what we've got."

He ran through a long, narrow vestibule and into a gloomy foyer. Somewhere above him came a tramp of feet and he started up the stairs two at a time, reaching the third floor hall just as a door closed at the far end.

Captain Devlin and the four plain-clothesmen from the precinct house made the drab living-room seem crowded. Deployed about a still, small form on the floor, they whirled in unison at Casey's entrance, standing mute and immobile until Devlin glared at the big photographer and in an outraged voice shouted:

"Get out!"

Casey could not see the face of the man on the floor, but he did see the light-gray suit, stained darkly across the chest.

"Well, you guys," Devlin snapped.

"Wait a minute," Casey argued as the four plain-clothesmen converged upon him.

"Wait, hell!" said Devlin a fat, red-nosed veteran with a dyspeptic disposition. "You've got no business in here and you know it."

Strong hands grabbed Casey. Devlin opened the door. The big photographer began to move forcibly backward. He braced himself but it did not do much good and as he slid into the hall and the hands released him he said:

"All right, wise guy. I got a picture of Marcy about an hour ago; with some guy and a woman. Right out here on the sidewalk."

"What's that?" Devlin sputtered.

"You heard me," Casey growled. "And if you don't want to play ball it's okay with me." He straightened his coat, started to walk away.

"Hey," Devlin called. And when Casey kept moving: "Stop him!"

Casey stopped before the plain-clothesman reached him. "So I stay, huh?" he asked dryly.

"Is this level?"

"Certainly."

"You stay," Devlin grumbled. "But no camera business—not until Homicide gets here, anyway."

"Hah!" Casey said. "I'll be right back."

Out on the street again, he pulled his camera and plate-case from his roadster. Edith French, watching with wide blue eyes, said:

"What is it?"

"I think somebody put the slug on Dan Marcy."

"Put the slug—"

"Shot him," Casey explained. "I'm going back and wait. Here." He took two plate-holders from his pocket. "There's two pictures in each of these—three of the party and one I took of Marcy. Get them back to the office. Right away."

Quick disappointment filmed the blue eyes. "But," she protested, "I mean, can't I stay with you?"

Casey shook his head and glanced down at the wrist watch on the girl's arm, an expensive, platinum rectangle with a thin black line bordering the crystal. "You've got to get your assignment in. And that picture might be important," he added, thinking of the man with the mustache who had asked for it. He saw the girl's disappointment, grinned at her. "It's still a good break for you. There's nothing you can do here now, but Blaine won't hate you when you go back and tell him that Dan Marcy just got shot."

Lieutenant Logan, of the homicide squad, listened patiently to Casey's story of the scene on the sidewalk and the picture he had taken.

"But you don't know this other guy or the woman," he asked when Casey finished.

"No."

"Maybe *we* will," Logan said, "when we get a look at your picture."

"You can have it for one of the room," Casey said casually.

Logan's brows lifted over steady black eyes. He was a tall, lean man, dressy, with a knack of wearing clothes so that they always looked freshly pressed. Competent, effective, he knew his job and he knew Casey.

"One," he said wearily, and nodded to the plain-clothesman who had been standing guard over Casey's camera and plate-case.

Casey's work with his camera and tripod was automatic; his thoughts centered on the background of Dan Marcy. In life he had been a shrewd, dapper little fellow with the ability to make money without doing much work. He had been a book-maker, a confidence man—of sorts, a contact man for a pre-Repeal alcohol syndicate. Yet, in spite of his extra-legal activities, he was a likable fellow and he had never been mixed up in the more vicious rackets nor been associated with gunmen and strong-arm methods.

His two years in Atlanta, his first jail term, were the result of an attempt to promote a fake lottery, based upon a fictitious sweepstakes. Rumor had it that he had collected heavily before the Postal Inspectors caught him, but the authorities had never been able to trace his profits, even though they had checked the banks for safe-deposit boxes and bank accounts that he might have used secretly.

Casey took his picture, unmindful of the others in the room, and closed his camera and tripod. He

sighed unconsciously as he put his paraphernalia away. In death Marcy was a shrunken abject figure. The pale face was pinched; the sandy hair was rumpled and the gray suit looked too big for him. In spite of himself, Casey felt a stir of pity, because, strangely enough, he had liked the little man. He was a crook, but he had never done anyone any bodily harm; the ultimate penalty seemed too severe.

A uniformed policeman opened the door, checking Casey's thoughts. "Mr. Boyd is out here," the officer said.

Logan said: "Boyd? Send him in."

Harvey Boyd was a lawyer, and he looked the part. Immaculately dressed, he was a well-built man of forty or so, with reddish hair, crisp gray eyes and the hearty, prepossessing manner that goes so well in a courtroom. He came into the room with a puzzled expression on his clean-shaven face, let his eyes sweep the interior until they touched the body; then, for a second or two, his assurance left him and he stared slack-jawed while color oozed from his face.

"Murdered?" he asked finally in a flat, hollow voice. Logan nodded gravely and Boyd said: "I had a date with him. He called me up this noon and told me to come over about five-thirty." He glanced about the room, surveying each man in turn, as though searching for some answer.

"For what?" Logan asked.

"This."

Boyd took a sealed envelope from his pocket. Logan accepted it, felt of it and finally tore off one end and shook out a small, flat key wrapped in a blank sheet of paper. He passed it to Captain Devlin, rubbed a thumb across the hinge of his jaw.

"What's it for?"

"I don't know," Boyd said.

"Suppose you tell us what you do know?"

Boyd sat down wearily on the arm of a chair, absently lighting a cigarette. When he finally spoke it was apparent that here was a man who knew his rights and could not easily be bluffed. His gray eyes were steady under Logan's glance when he began to speak.

"I'd like to know more about it myself. I was his lawyer, you know that."

"And a nice job you did on the mail-fraud indictment," Logan said dryly. "Two years was cheap." He paused and his eyelids drooped. "Marcy took the rap. There were some others mixed up—Nate Kilday for one. But Marcy took the blame and the rest got off with six months or suspended sentences."

He went on to repeat Casey's story of the strange man and woman, then added: "And a woman gave us a tip on this thing. Marcy bled quite a lot. From the marks on the carpet he crawled to the telephone"—he indicated a

small table near an inner doorway—"pulled it off and made a call before he died. We found the phone on the floor. But a woman called in and said there'd been a shooting. Now what about that key?"

Boyd took a breath, stared at the smoking tip of his cigarette.

"All right," he said, "I'll tell you what I know. Dan gave me this key the day he was sentenced. It was already in the envelope but he told me it was a key. That's all there is to it. I can guess what it's for and so can you: a safe-deposit box. He gave it to me for safe keeping—but he didn't tell me where it fitted. If he made a clean-up he was telling nobody about it—not even me."

"That makes two angles," Logan said. "The Postal Inspectors never found any money. Dan may have got plugged for holding out; or he may have got it because he was protecting somebody, and that somebody was scared now that he was out."

Logan took off a new-looking panama and wiped his forehead. "Marcy never was a gunman, but he was a cocky lad at that." His voice thinned out. "If the chiselers were after dough they rubbed him out too soon—if this is the key. Maybe it was something else. When we start checking this key and Casey's picture I've got an idea we'll find out."

The *Tap Room* is a third rate bar on Washington, not far from Kneeland. Sandwiched in between a delicatessen and a cut-rate stationery store, it presents vacant, curtained windows to the street and dispenses drinks without trimmings, atmosphere or ventilation. When Casey and Lieutenant Logan stepped into the long narrow room shortly before seven o'clock there were four or five beer drinkers at the bar listening to the baseball scores come in on the radio, and a solitary whisky drinker slouched at one of the tables along the right wall.

The bartender said hello to Casey, eyed Logan suspiciously, and kept polishing the mahogany. Logan walked the length of the room until he came to a door beyond another door that said *Men*. He entered without knocking.

Nate Kilday, with his weight on his shoulderblades and his feet on a dusty, roll-topped desk, was reading a paper which he lowered slowly, folded carefully and tossed on the desk before he said:

"Hello, Lieutenant. Hi, Flash."

Casey nodded and Logan said: "Hello, Nate. What've you been doing this afternoon?"

"Just the usual this and that," Kilday said negligently.

"And where were you doing it?"

"Since when?"

"About four or four-thirty."

Kilday swung his feet down and swiveled erect. He was a thick-set, bushy-browed man with small dark eyes and perpetually lowered lids

which gave a peering, suspicious expression to his broad, heavy-nosed face. He had, Casey knew, a record of arrests as long as his arm—with very few convictions, the last one being a six months' sojourn for being involved with Dan Marcy in the lottery set-up. In the past ten years he had been in and out of a dozen rackets, all of them questionable, and most of them depending on coercion for success.

Now he folded thick-fingered hands across his stomach, let his lips dip at the corners and fixed that peering gaze of his on Logan in a moment of silence before he answered.

"It sounds like you want an alibi," he said, grinning with an expression that was more like a leer.

"Dan Marcy got knocked off this afternoon," Logan said evenly. "Where were you?"

"When?"

"From four-thirty on."

"Here."

"Prove it, can you?"

"If I have to."

"Got a gun?" Logan's right hand shot out and pulled Kilday from the chair.

"Say listen," Kilday fumed. "You can't do this."

"Watch me," Logan said and slid his hands over Kilday's body in deft, practiced movements.

The stocky man's face flushed and his eyes got ugly, dangerous lights in them.

"Speak your piece and get the hell out," he rasped. "Make trouble for me, Lieutenant, and I'll—"

Logan put his hand on Kilday's chest and pushed. "Sit down," he said, and when the man hit the chair bottom, Logan wheeled it away from the desk and began to search the drawers.

"I wish you would make some trouble," he lipped. "I'm just in the right mood for it, heel. . . . Well?" He slammed a drawer shut and waited. When Kilday flattened his lips and remained sullenly silent Logan grunted disdainfully and stepped to the door.

"We'll want you before we get through," he told Kilday flatly. "Stick around and come when I send for you."

Out on the sidewalk, Logan gave the police chauffeur an address on Hemenway Street and said, speaking to nobody in particular: "That's the kind of a rat I'd like to stick with this rap."

"Kilday?" Casey said.

"Yes, Kilday."

"So where we goin'?"

"To break a little news to the Nissen woman—if she doesn't already know. Then we'll get that picture you took."

Stella Nissen was a tall, blond woman. She was thirty or a little more, with a fair skin, the blue eyes of a Swede and hair that was a natural golden yellow. She was, Casey thought as he followed Logan into her modestly furnished

apartment, just the sort of woman a fellow like Dan Marcy would choose. Big, placid, capable, comfortable—an exact opposite in type, disposition and temperament.

Casey had known her a long time, used to eat in the restaurant she and Carl Nissen had owned before he got to boozing, and broke his neck falling down a flight of cellar stairs. From that time until he had left for Atlanta Dan Marcy had been her constant companion, a fact which Casey remembered as he got his hat off and spoke to her. He also noticed that her voice seemed strangely subdued when she said: "Hello, Flash," and offered a tired, shallow smile.

Logan said: "Sit down a minute, Mrs. Nissen. I've got something to say."

The curve went out of her lips and she hesitated, a puzzled expression in her tired blue eyes. When she finally sat down on the edge of an overstuffed chair, Logan said:

"You know Dan Marcy was in town?"

"Yes. He called me up."

"Did you see him?"

"N-o."

"I thought you were pretty good friends," Logan said quietly.

"We were."

"Well—he was shot this afternoon."

Casey had his eyes on the woman's face when Logan spoke, and for an instant or so she did not move a muscle. Finally her lids blinked and her lips parted and went slack.

"No," she said huskily. "Oh—no!"

"Somewhere around five," Logan said gently.

After that no one said anything for quite a while. Casey feeling uncomfortable and with an odd thickness in his throat, watched the woman for a few seconds. A consummate weariness seemed to envelop her. Without moving, she appeared to sag, as though something had gone from inside her. There was no other reaction. Or if there was, whatever surprise or shock she may have felt was hidden by the very calmness of her nature.

"Why?" she said finally. "Why? He never hurt anyone. He never even owned a gun."

"We thought maybe you'd know why," Logan said. Then, in a flat, hurried monotone, he told what had happened, explaining about what Casey had seen, and the key Harvey Boyd had brought to Marcy's apartment. "Did he ever mention that key?" Logan finished.

Stella Nissen dropped her gaze and spoke without looking at Logan.

"No."

"What happened to the money he took out of that lottery racket?"

"I don't know."

"Listen," Logan's voice grew sharp. "We need some help. He either was covering up for some

guy, or he was killed because of something connected with that key. I thought you were that way about each other."

Stella sat tight-lipped and motionless, her cheekbones chalky.

Logan rose and clapped on his hat, his lean, good-looking face grim and unpleasant lights in his dark eyes.

"Maybe I was wrong. I thought he carried the torch for you before he got sent up. If he did he would have told you some things. But he didn't, huh?"

"Not about that," she said, still not looking at him.

"Okay," Logan said. "I think you're lying, and I'm gonna try and prove it. A woman tipped us off this afternoon. Marcy made one phone call before he died. Maybe we can trace it."

Tom Wade, who was the only photographer in the studio on the third floor of the *Express* building when Casey and Logan arrived, tossed aside the paper he had been reading, greeted the pair with a grin and said:

"Where you been, Flash? Blaine's been looking all over for you."

"Who developed those plates I sent in?" Casey demanded.

"What plates?"

Casey controlled his impatience with an effort and took pains with his words. "You know that French girl?"

"The new one—up in Society?" Wade said, his round boyish face cracking in a smile. "Yeah. She's nice, huh?"

"I was out on assignment with her," Casey said irritably. "I sent some plates in with her. Where the hell are they?"

Wade's face sobered at Casey's abrupt, unsmiling manner. "I don't know."

Casey grunted exasperatedly, stalked into the dark room and looked over a half-dozen plates in the drying rack. Realizing now that it was a waste of time talking to Wade and that any one of ten photographers on the *Express* might have done the developing, he came back to the ante-room and ordered Logan to follow him with a jerk of his head.

On the floor above, Casey tramped hard-heeled across the city room. Blaine saw him coming and leaned back in his chair.

"Well, well," he said. "Nice of you to stop in."

"Where are my pictures?" Casey demanded sourly.

Blaine remained silent, a pinched, sardonic expression on his lean face, his cold gray eyes narrowed and hostile.

"I told French to bring them in," Casey went on, "but I can't find 'em downstairs and—"

"Oh—" Blaine cut in. "You told French to bring them in. I send you out at four o'clock to get a couple pictures of a garden party, and tell you to stick with French, and you

come in at seven-thirty and start asking questions."

Blaine jerked erect in his chair and pointed his pencil at Casey. "I haven't seen your plates. I haven't got the garden story. I haven't even seen French."

Blaine went on with some more of his sarcastic comments, but Casey did not hear them. A sudden, gnawing hollowness attacked the pit of his stomach and spread quickly through him, leaving alarm and an odd weakness in its wake. His craggy jaw sagged. His eyes were remote and a film of moisture spread over his forehead. He stood stiffly immobile until Logan pulled at his arm and said:

"Hey! What is this, another run-around?"

Casey's thoughts jerked to the moment. Blaine was still talking in acid, biting sentences.

"Well," he rapped, "say something, you big tramp. I want to know—"

Casey put his hands on the desk, leaned forward, and said: "How would you like to lose a couple teeth?"

He did not speak very loud, but his tone was cold and measured. Nearby, clattering typewriters fell silent. Three or four rewrite men gaped in astonishment; work stopped in the slot. Blaine's eyes bulged and a wave of color surged up from his neck.

"Listen," he raved, "I'll have you—"

"You listen," Casey lipped. "I've got no scruples about socking a smaller man. Save that routine of yours until you hear what I've got to say."

Blaine's color fled and a tightness spread over his face. When Casey talked like that you believed him; he wasn't much of a bluffer and right now his rugged face was grim and there was a bad look in his dark eyes. Blaine swallowed air and waited.

Casey told his story, all of it. As he finished he reached in his pocket and took out the plate-holder he had exposed in Dan Marcy's room.

"This'll show you it isn't a gag," he said. "I left her in my car and told her to bring those two plate-holders back." He hesitated, did not really believe what he said next, but it was the only thing he could think of. "She wants to be a reporter. If she ain't here she must be out chasing around on some screwy idea, trying to mastermind us and get a beat."

He straightened up, took a breath and swept the room with a glance before looking back at Blaine. "So don't give me any lip about what I should've done. Reporters are your worry—if you trained 'em right you might get better results."

For once Blaine did not have an answer ready and Casey swung away from the desk before he could think of one. Logan followed him back to the studio, then said:

"You've been a big help, all right."

Casey glared to cover up his fears. There had been no satisfaction in what he had told Blaine. He could not help thinking that it was his fault Edith French had not returned. It was not the thought of leaving her to drive his car back to the office that bothered him, but that he had entrusted her with that picture he had taken of Dan Marcy—and the fellow who wanted that plate. There could be but one answer for her disappearance—that plate.

"I guess this'll be more than we thought," Logan said dryly. "You'd better come down with me and look over our gallery. Maybe you can pick out this guy that was with Marcy. Maybe the girl is just out chasing around; if not, well, we'll have to find him."

Casey worked the knuckles of one fist into his other palm; then gave Wade a brief story of what had happened. He gave the young photographer the plate he had taken in Marcy's apartment, told him to develop it.

"Then stick around," he ordered. "She may show up—or call up or something. I want to know just as soon as anything breaks. You can get me at Headquarters."

Casey spent nearly two hours in the Bureau of Records, looking through cabinet after cabinet of photographs. When he did not find his man he telephoned Tom Wade.

"Stay there for another hour," Casey said. "I'm going home and wait. There's a chance that somebody might want to get in touch with me. Call me there if you hear anything."

To Logan he said: "Where'll you be?"

"Here, for a while." The Lieutenant surveyed Casey with thoughtful dark eyes. Those eyes were experienced, wise; they could see beneath many surfaces and there was understanding in their depths now. "And don't get all het up about the dame," he said. "It may be nothing. Even if it is, what about it? If the guy wanted the plate and grabbed her, okay. She's got it. When he finds out it's the right one he'll let her go."

"We hope," Casey said.

There had been no word of Casey's roadster when he left Police Headquarters, and he walked down Stuart Street, continuing on to the *Statler*. Because he hoped that he might get some word at his apartment, and because if he did get that word he wanted to be ready to move, he sought a taxi driver he knew and climbed in the cab.

"I want this by the hour, Bonzo," he said. "For a couple of hours anyway."

"Hour, day or week," Bonzo cracked, tramping on the starter, "it's all the same to me. Where do we start?"

When Casey unlocked the door of

his apartment, he snapped on the overhead light in the old, high-ceilinged living-room, and went directly to the ice box and kitchenette. He poured a short Scotch, drank it while he was getting out ice cubes; then he made a long drink with soda and went back to the living-room.

Dropping into a worn wing-chair, he stared sightlessly about the somberly furnished but comfortable room and tried to fight off the rancorous pressure of his thoughts. He did not have much success. He was still battling this pressure when, ten minutes later, someone knocked at the door.

The sound of that knocking snapped the strain of imagination and brought relief. With hope rising, he sprang from his chair, strode to the door and threw it open; then he was staring at the girl he had seen with Dan Marcy that afternoon.

For several seconds, neither of them spoke. Casey stepped back, holding the door. The girl came in, giving him plenty of room and eying him suspiciously. Closing the door, he leaned against it and studied her.

Close up, she reminded him of a burlesque soubrette: a vivid brunette, with a smooth, lacquered finish, a red painted mouth and baby-blue eyes that were icy. Her three-quarter length linen coat which hung open disclosed a yellow silk dress so tight she was practically naked; she looked like a girl who knew most of the answers.

"Remember that picture you took of us this afternoon?"

Casey nodded.

"I want it."

"Just like that, huh?"

"Just like that."

Her voice was crisp, staccato, and there was assurance in her manner as she stood in the center of the room watching him. She had, Casey realized, a lot more assurance than he had because her request did not make sense to him.

"It must be important," he said curtly, deciding to stall and see what he could learn.

"It is. Is your girl?"

"So you've got her." Casey pushed away from the door. "You get a lot of years for kidnaping."

"So they tell me," the girl said. "But you're ahead of yourself. It wasn't kidnaping. She followed us. All we did was hold her."

A sudden weariness blanketed Casey. So he'd been right. Edith French *had* tried to pull a fast one instead of doing as he told her. This girl and her man must have been in the street when Casey left Edith French—or she had seen them on her way back to the office. And she had followed them, probably shaping her action by what she'd read in books or seen in the movies. But still—that didn't explain the missing plates.

"I haven't got the picture," he said bluntly.

"You took it, didn't you? If it's at your office, get it."

"The girl had the picture," Casey said.

"If she did we'd have it now, wouldn't we?"

The crisp statement was a slap in the face and the only answer Casey could think of was: "Did you search my roadster?"

"Certainly."

"I haven't got it," Casey said, hopelessly entangled now. "And it's not at the office."

"Listen," the girl said coldly. "We're not fooling. We didn't snatch her, but we can hold her until you—"

"Call the *Express,*" Casey cut in. "Ask for the city desk—or anybody you want. See who's fooling."

Mascara'd lids narrowed slowly over the blue eyes and for the first time they mirrored doubt and uncertainty. She backed to the telephone, hesitated, finally dialed a number. She clung to the instrument for a long time and gradually all color fled from her face. Her eyes widened and her painted lips seemed to flatten against her teeth.

Casey did not understand this change until he realized she had not called the *Express,* but some other number. When she cradled the instrument he started for her. There was no mistaking the set of his neck or the look in his eyes, and the girl recoiled a step, made a quick movement of her right arm and sleeve; then Casey was staring into the muzzle of a small automatic.

"Stay there!"

Casey stopped, measured the six or eight feet that separated him from the gun.

"Listen, sister," he growled. "Quit waving that thing and get wise."

There was fear in the girl's eyes now, but not in her voice—or if there was Casey could not detect it.

"Back up. Away from the door."

Casey grunted, waiting motionless.

The girl took a step forward. "How would you like one in each leg, sonny boy?"

Casey had seen women like this before. He thought she would shoot if she had to, but as he considered ways of trying to get the gun he thought of a better idea. His lips curved in a mirthless grin, his brows climbed a half inch; he gestured emptily and stepped away from the windows, saying: "Have it you way."

The girl crossed quickly to the door, opened it. As she backed out she said: "Stick your nose out and I'll crease it—and don't think I can't."

Casey stood motionless until the door closed and he heard spike heels clop down the stairs; then, with a swift, deft movement, he threw up the window and called: "Bonzo!"

The taxi driver's head popped out of a lowered window and he said: "Huh?"

"There's a dame coming down," Casey called. "Follow her; then come back and get me. I want to call on her."

He closed the window, stepped to one side and peered behind the curtain. A few seconds later he saw the girl on the sidewalk. He watched her hesitate, take a step, then spin towards the taxi and open the door.

Casey made noises in his throat and said:

"For once our side gets a break."

Standard Street was a deserted block of small apartments, presenting a solid wall of brick which, with sidewalk and asphalt pavement, poured out into the night air the heat absorbed in the day. This stagnant warmth was oppressive and Casey pushed back his hat and mopped his forehead as he surveyed the drab and darkened slice of apartment house Bonzo had pointed out.

"I followed her in," Bonzo said, "and I heard her go all the way up, but I don't know what apartment."

"We'll find out," Logan said.

They located a bald, sleepy-eyed janitor in the basement quarters, learned that the heat had driven out most of his tenants and that only two apartments were rented on the third floor. When Logan described the woman he sought, the janitor said:

"Yeah. A Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson. They got 3-D."

Logan took a key and he and Casey came back to the main foyer and climbed two flights of stairs through dead air that grew hotter as they went up. 3-D was on the right, rear. Logan shifted his gun to his coat pocket, kept his right hand on it and reached for the doorknob with his left hand. When he found the door locked, he fitted the key, turned back the bolt and stepped through the doorway with Casey at his heels.

The lighted living-room was a shambles. Chairs were upset, the cushions of a red-plush davenport were strewn about, a table drawer lay bottom-side up on the floor and the drawers of a cheap-looking Governor Winthrop desk were pulled part-way open.

Casey shut the door and said: "Late again, huh?"

"Yeah," a sharp voice barked. "Get 'em up!"

Casey spun towards the voice which had come from his left. In the doorway of an adjoining room stood a tall, stoop-shouldered man with a thin, sallow face and a long bony nose. He wore a wrinkled Palm Beach suit and held a .45 automatic in his right hand. Casey lifted his arms six inches.

"You with the hand in your pocket," the man said.

Casey heard Logan curse softly, but at the moment he paid no attention to what the Lieutenant did. Because in that moment he recognized this gunman as the fellow who had

been leaning against the wall of Marcy's apartment building that afternoon when Casey had taken the picture: the fellow with the newspaper.

"That's better," the man said, and then Casey saw that Logan's hands were at his sides. "Now over by the wall—and face it."

Casey saw that the man was scared, but there was little comfort in the knowledge. He locked glances with Logan, who said: "If you hadn't stopped right in my way—"

"Sure, I know," Casey growled. "Always my fault."

He moved slowly across the room, faced the wall. A second later Logan moved up beside him.

"Get those hands up—high!" the man said.

Casey reached; so did Logan.

"And if you turn around—" The man talked slowly until the sentence was punctuated by the slamming of the door.

Logan and Casey matched strides across the room, the Lieutenant's gun flashing from his pocket. Casey started out when Logan threw open the door, was yanked violently back just as a gun roared from somewhere on the left and a splinter flew from the doorjamb a foot from Casey's shoulder.

"This is my job," Logan lipped, and went into the hall with a quick, crouching leap, whipping up the gun as he moved.

This time there was no shot. Footsteps pounded down the stairs in an uneven, thumping sequence. Logan broke into a run, took a snap shot from the top of the stairs; then started down with Casey right behind him. With speed unchecked, they reached the ground floor foyer, dashed through the vestibule, and out on the sidewalk.

Fifty or sixty feet down the street, flame flared briefly while a gun roared twice in quick succession. Logan fired once, kept running with his arm outstretched. A shadowy figure whirled and dashed across the pavement and into the brightened circle of a street light. Logan slid to a stop, aimed; then, in the instant before he squeezed the trigger, the fleeing man wheeled and dropped to his knees, jerking up his automatic for a deliberate shot.

Logan's service revolver leaped in his hand, crashed and the blast of sound reverberated from the brick-walled street. The kneeling figure seemed to bounce. A gun fell to the pavement, glistening in reflected light as the echoes of the shot died away. The man flopped forward on his hands, swayed, and fell limply on his face.

Casey, who had kept right on running, was the first to reach the fallen gunman. He saw one leg stiffen and become still. Cursing, he reached down and felt for a pulse beat in a limp wrist. Logan dropped to one knee, pushed Casey aside

and roughly turned the man over on his back.

Casey let go of the wrist and trouble settled over him while Logan made an inspection of his own. Bonzo came up behind them. Windows banged open along the street; excited voices shuttled back and forth through the night.

"Holy Jeez!" Bonzo breathed. "I quit."

Casey stood up and pushed his breath through his teeth. "So you had to get a bull's-eye, huh?" he growled.

"He ducked," Logan countered grimly. "I was after his legs. He dropped right into the slug."

A uniformed policeman ran into the circle of light with his gun in one hand and a nightstick in the other. "Hey," he wheezed, puffing loudly from his run, "what the hell's going on here?"

Casey made a quick search of the three-room-and-bath suite while Logan reported to Headquarters, and in the room where the tall gunman had waited, he found the wrist watch: a rectangular, platinum miniature with a thin black line around the crystal. It lay under the bed which, although not turned down, was badly mussed, as though someone had lain there for quite a while. There was no mistaking the watch; Casey was forced to admit that which he had heretofore been afraid to consider: Edith French had been held in this apartment.

Logan was standing over to one side of the telephone table staring down at the floor when Casey shuffled into the living-room.

"She was here," Casey said.

"How do you know?" Logan asked, not looking up.

"This is hers." Casey held up the watch. "I noticed it this afternoon. She must've got it off and kicked it under the bed in case we showed up here."

He dropped the hand holding the watch, let his arm slap against his hip, and moved slowly towards Logan, a burly figure with a sweat-streaked face and eyes that were harried and restless. As he approached Logan he became aware that the dark, good-looking face was pinched at the lips and little knots of muscle bulged at the corners of the jaw. Then Casey saw what Logan had been staring at.

In the flashy pattern of the cheap and threadbare rug was a brownish stain two or three inches across.

For a long minute neither man spoke. Casey held his breath, and with sweat streaming down his rugged face, felt a sudden chill run through him and heard the dark whisper of his fears. He felt a little sick and when he could stand the silence no longer he dropped to his knee and touched a finger to the brown stain. It felt damp, but he could not be sure because of the film of moisture on his hand.

"That could mean anything," Logan said, as though he read the big photographer's thoughts.

Casey stood up, forced himself to think logically and speak reasonably.

"Besides Marcy," he said thickly, "three people knew about that picture. I thought there was two—the girl that came after me and the guy she was with. There was one other."

"Who?" Logan asked sharply.

"The guy out there in the street," Casey said, and explained how the man had been leaning against Marcy's apartment building reading a newspaper when he took his picture.

"But it doesn't add up," he continued bitterly. "That picture wasn't worth murder. And anyway, where the hell is it? I gave it to Edith French. Suppose she tried to pull a fast one? Suppose they put the pressure on her and she—"

He broke off and a hoarseness in his throat kept him from continuing.

"Have you got to figure it that way?" Logan asked. "Hell, this don't have to be her blood."

"It's somebody's," Casey said drearily. "And if she was in that bedroom she must know whose. What does that make her? A witness to murder."

"There're too many women in this to figure anything yet," Logan said.

"Yeah. And damn you, Logan!" Casey stuck out his jaw and his dark eyes had unpleasant lights in them. "You had to plug that hood. The one guy that could give us a lead. You wouldn't take a chance, huh? And what've we got? Nothing. If anything happens to that girl now—"

Casey went on like this until he ran out of breath. But this blast of his pent-up emotions brought no relief. He knew Logan was not to blame, knew that he had acted as any good detective would have acted and that they had been crossed up by a bad break and nothing more. That Logan gave him no argument and made no excuses served to increase Casey's own resentment at himself and he finally turned away, his dark eyes both stubborn and ashamed.

"Whatever happens," Logan said quietly, "it's not your fault. The sooner you cool off and start being reasonable the better it'll be."

"I gave her the plates, didn't I?" Casey lipped.

"It's not your fault she didn't take 'em to your office. You did a swell job in locating this dump. The hood surprised us and we had a tough break, that's all. This may be a start. If the French girl was dead she'd be here now; there'd be no percentage in carting her around unless she was alive."

"Okay," Casey said wearily. "Maybe you're right. I guess it got me scared. If you knew this girl, you'd know why. Young and sweet, with the sort of class that's the real

thing—the kind mugs like you and I don't know much about. I was sore this afternoon. I acted like a heel when I was with her; and when I think of her getting mixed up in any part of this—"

He broke off, glared about the room and began to pace restlessly while he growled deep down in his throat and said: "Hell! Let's do something."

At four o'clock the following afternoon Casey walked into Lieutenant Logan's office on the third floor of Police Headquarters and flopped into a chair next to the desk. Logan, engaged in staring vacantly out the lone window, glanced around, frowned and went back to his staring. Casey took out a cigarette, tapped it nervously against his palm.

"When you gonna show something?" he asked gruffly when he had inhaled.

"I wish I knew," Logan said, without shifting his gaze.

"About the only thing you found," Casey grumbled, "is my roadster."

When Logan made no answer, Casey fell silent, reviewing the meager developments in the disappearance of Edith French. When he came to work that morning he had been called to the office of MacGrath, the managing editor, and shown a letter which had been delivered a short time previous. The message, brief and to the point, had said: *The girl is okay. If you want to keep her that way lay off the publicity and the cops.*

As a result of this there had been no publicity whatsoever so far as the girl was concerned. MacGrath had cautioned the Police Commissioner and the official investigation proceeded quietly. Casey told his story to MacGrath, repeated it later to Edith French's father and brother, and tried to sound confident when he said he did not think she would be hurt.

For the balance of the day he had stayed in his office because he was afraid to leave, afraid that some word might come and find him missing. A morose, silent figure he had waited in the studio, speaking only when asked a direct question, and not always then. Now, because he could no longer stand such inaction, he had come to Logan for some relief from festering thoughts that had become diseased because he could not expose them.

"That's about it," Logan said. He swiveled in his chair, spread his hands and sighed disgustedly. "We worked over Kilday for five hours —until his mouthpiece got him out on a writ. We searched his bar and his apartment. We spent another couple hours on the Nissen woman; we searched her place; we had the State Police search that tavern of hers down on the Cape." He passed a palm over his smooth black hair, gestured emptily.

"Blanks and more blanks. We

haven't got a line on that baby that called on you, or the guy she was with. The hood I plugged is just a hood. Name of Griefman. He's got a record and he used to work in the South. The only connection we see is that he might've tailed Marcy up from Atlanta."

Logan fell glumly silent and Casey began anew his inner searching for some lead, some clue; something to do. After nearly ten minutes of this he decided to go and have another talk with Stella Nissen.

Without another word, he rose and left the room. Going downstairs to the press room where he had left Tom Wade, he motioned him out with a jerk of his head and led the way to the street and his recovered roadster which had been found abandoned in Brookline.

Stella Nissen's apartment was locked, a possibility Casey had considered on the ride over. Stella divided her time between the city and her tavern near North Falmouth; and he had made up his mind to conduct a search of his own if he found her gone. None of his keys fitted the lock, but after a lot of prying at the casing, he finally gained admittance by a thin, celluloid rule which pushed back the sloping bolt.

"What're you gonna look for?" Wade asked dryly, easing down on the davenport.

"How do I know?" Casey snapped irritably.

"I thought the police already searched the joint."

"They did. But they were looking for money. I'm just looking."

He stood surveying the comfortably furnished and feminine living-room, deciding that the mahogany secretary in one corner would be a good starting place. Pushing back his sweat-stained felt, he went to work.

The glassed-in upper part of the secretary was filled with books, and after a quick glance, Casey opened the desk-section. The pigeon-holes were well filled with papers and letters, and he pulled up a chair, sat down and, starting on the left side of the desk, began to examine everything in sight.

It took Casey about a half hour to make his first find, a thin slip of bond paper imprinted with the name: Falmouth National Bank and wedged in the middle of a sheaf of receipts. Instantly Casey's eyes got bright with interest. On the top of the sheet a printed line said: *Don't take chances with your valuables.* Underneath this: *Safe deposit boxes from* $3.00. The rest of the information on the slip said, in effect, that this was a receipt for fifteen dollars box rent for the year ending August 1935.

Casey stared at the receipt for quite a while, finally stirring himself to say, softly: "About a year ago, huh?" Nodding, he pocketed

the slip of paper and continued his search until, about an hour later, he came to the bottom drawer. It was here that he found a packet of letters, fourteen in all, bound with a thin, pink ribbon.

Shamelessly, Casey untied the ribbon and fanned out the letters. Each one was addressed to Stella Nissen and each bore an Atlanta postmark, the dates ranging from September, 1934, to July, 1935. After a moment's hesitation, Casey opened an envelope, began to read a letter that started: *Honey.*

What he read was purely and simply a love letter, and it was the sort of letter that—considering its source—surprised him. It did not slop over with sentiment; rather it was frank, affectionate, newsy—the sort of letter a man—almost any man—would write to a woman he loved. The sincerity of emotion and understanding lay unwritten behind nearly every sentence.

Casey opened every letter. Each one made him feel an odd sense of shame, but an unrelenting stubbornness drove him on. He did not read any of the others, he merely scanned them looking for some mention of money, a bank account, anything that might be a lead. At last, hot and discouraged from the monotonous task, he put the letters together, clumsily retied them.

They were all over a year old, and while there were no newer ones in evidence, he accepted the fact that they would probably be the same kind of letters. Marcy would not dare give any direct information in a prison letter which was subject to censure.

"If you weren't such a fathead," he growled under his breath, "you'd have known that before."

Still, he told himself, the letters had made clear the real relationship between Stella and Dan Marcy. He stretched, yawned, and stood up. Not until he saw Wade fast asleep on the davenport with his mouth open and his hat over his eyes did he remember the young photographer.

When Casey and Wade came back to the *Express* a half hour later they found Lieutenant Logan and Sergeant Manahan waiting for them in the studio anteroom.

"I'd begun to think you didn't work here any more," Logan said dryly, then took a rolled photograph out of his pocket and straightened it out on Casey's desk.

The picture was a close-up of a man who lay upon a narrow, bed-like stretcher, with only the head and upper part of the torso visible. A sheet had been pulled up to the armpits, the shoulders were bare, and the face, with eyes closed, was colorless and composed. The man had a small mustache, a scar on one cheekbone, thin lips and black hair.

Casey's nerves tightened up and he kept staring until Logan's voice shattered his somber thoughts.

"Know him?"

"Took you long enough to find him," Casey said.

"He was on the floor of a sedan with phoney plates," Logan said. "It was parked all day out in Allston and the cop on the beat didn't take a look in it until about five o'clock. He took two in the chest—some time last night or early this morning."

Casey sighed and dropped wearily into his desk chair. "Well," he said finally, "that's him, all right. He was with Marcy in the afternoon, and he wanted the picture I gave the French girl."

"Name of Bert Jadick," Logan said. "Had a private dick's license on him. From New York. We had Center Street on the phone but they couldn't tell us much. He hasn't got any record—just another chiseler, I guess. Has a woman—secretary or something—named Lucille Doucette. She must be the babe that pulled the gun on you."

"And what does that make us?" Casey grumbled.

Logan shrugged, rolled up the photograph and slid it into an inside pocket.

"We probably won't know until we find Jadick's woman—or the French girl."

Casey slid down in his chair, tried to think; then tried to stop when he found that thinking only made things worse. There was, he saw, no percentage in telling Logan that he had searched Stella Nissen's apartment, and he decided to do nothing until he had a chance to talk to the woman.

"That all you've got?" he asked irritably.

"So far," Logan said. "That key we got from Boyd don't belong to any bank in town. We're checking now from the manufacturer's end." He motioned to Manahan and stopped in the doorway long enough to say: "Keep the chin up, Flash," before he went out.

Wade began to jabber excitedly. Casey, staring humidly at the blank, calcimined wall, heard Wade's voice, but he was not aware of what he said. Presently, he shook himself and said gruffly:

"How would you like to take a ride down to the Cape tonight?"

"Business or pleasure?" asked Wade.

"What do you care?"

"Now that you mention it," Wade said cockily, "I don't know that I do."

The *Seashell,* not far from the eastern shore of Buzzards Bay, was a blaze of light when Casey squeezed his roadster into the parking space at eleven-thirty. Locking the ignition, he sat behind the wheel for a moment, studying the contour of the tavern outlined against a brilliant moonlit sky. It was a two-story affair with broad, glassed-in verandas and a wide roof that sloped gently from the eaves to a much smaller second floor which looked as if it had been

dropped there as an afterthought.

The interior was divided between a bar and a long, low room filled with tables and, at the moment, customers. A girl was singing to a piano accompaniment, but there was no dance-floor, the attraction of Stella's management being well-cooked food and honest measures of good liquor. Casey and Wade stood at the bar and ordered rye and soda.

"I'm glad I came," Wade said contentedly, sipping his drink.

Casey said nothing and looked about, sultry dark eyes searching, speculative. After a moment he stepped to the doorway of the partition separating the bar from the dining-room, made a careful inspection of this room.

"What do we do now?" Wade asked.

"I want to see Stella," Casey said, and beckoned to the nearest bartender. "Stella around?" he asked.

"Someplace. Upstairs, I guess."

Casey finished his drink. "Nurse yours," he told Wade, "and stick around."

He went back along the bar, elbowing through a gay, mixed crowd that fought for bar space. Opening a door at the end of the room, he stepped into a little hall and climbed a short, steep flight of stairs to a closed door at the landing. Knocking, he waited until the door opened; then stepped quickly past Stella Nissen who said: "Flash," and looked surprised.

"I want to talk to you," Casey said, glancing over the small living-room with its maple Colonial furniture.

"But—I'll be busy until—"

"I'll wait," Casey said.

Stella Nissen closed the door and stood watching Casey, a tall, yellow-haired woman with tired blue eyes that seemed oddly restless. She wore a semi-evening dress of black satin which heightened her pallor, and when she spoke her voice seemed pinched.

"Why?" she asked.

"Several things," Casey said. "Sit down. Or do you want to wait until you close up?"

Stella Nissen moved to a kneehole desk, sat down behind it. Paying no attention to Casey, she opened a drawer and, after fumbling around, pulled out a wad of knitting and a ball of coral-colored yarn. She arranged things in her lap and when the needles began to click, Casey said:

"I searched your apartment this afternoon." He took out the packet of love letters and the receipt. "I found these."

Stella Nissen looked up. She did not speak, but her eyes flared a little before she jerked them back to her knitting.

"I didn't know what I was looking for," Casey said, "but the police weren't getting anywhere, and you seemed like my best lead." His

brows pulled down and his voice was low, and not very friendly. "It was a good hunch. They tie up, Stella. You know what the letters are. You know what this receipt is.

"It's a year old, but it's dated August—about the time that Marcy started for Atlanta. Another thing: the receipt says that Falmouth National has safe deposit boxes from three dollars up. For fifteen —what you paid—you could get quite a lot of space. Enough to hold plenty of jack, huh?"

Casey paused. When there was no sound but the click-click of the needles, he scowled and continued irritably.

"Marcy carried the torch for you for years. These letters prove it. I read one all the way through and—well"—Casey's face reddened and he squirmed in his chair—"they're real. Marcy was a wise-cracker, a sharpster, a smart money lad. In his way he was a sort of tough number. You're pretty hard yourself—in the sense that you know most of the answers, and what life is like with the gloss worn off. But between you—"

Casey hesitated and was amazed at the way he was talking. The ground he was trying to cover was unfamiliar; he wanted to make his point in a matter-of-fact way, and he couldn't seem to keep his reasoning impersonal. The idea of the thing made him uncomfortable, but he could think of no other line of attack, so he continued stubbornly.

"Well, damn it, Marcy loved you. He couldn't have written those letters if he hadn't been on the level."

Stella Nissen looked up for an instant with eyes that were tortured and shiny. Casey saw this but he didn't stop.

"And if I'm right this far—the rest is easy. If he loved you—and he did—you were the one he'd trust with any money he had. You lied to Logan but you're gonna come clean with me. I'm no cop. I'm not interested in murder. But I am interested in a girl that's tangled up in this rotten mess."

He explained about Edith French and what he thought had happened to her. "Somehow—some way, her disappearance ties in. I'm going to find her. Now do you tell me what you know or do I call the cops and let them get an order to search this safe deposit box and chase you out in the open?"

"I can't tell you now, Flash," Stella Nissen said.

"Okay." Casey strode to the desk and grabbed the telephone.

"But don't call—"

Casey ignored the plea, asked for long distance and eventually heard Logan's voice. When he explained where he was he said:

"Can you come down here now?"

"Hell," Logan said, "I've got no jurisdiction down there."

"You've got a gun," Casey said. "Pick up a State cop on your way

down if you want. I think Stella's about ready to talk."

When Stella Nissen went downstairs to supervise the closing of the *Seashell,* Casey went with her and found Wade propped on a bar stool hiccoughing into an empty glass.

"Why you louse," Casey snorted, shaking the youth and pulling him off the stool.

"'sa matter?" Wade said. "Had an awful thirst."

"Get the camera," Casey ordered, and waited by the main entrance until Wade returned from the roadster with the plate-case.

When the bartenders had left and the lights were snapped off downstairs, Casey and Wade followed Stella Nissen through the door at the end of the bar. She locked this door from the inside, unlocked another door which opened into the little hall from the outside of the building.

"Callers expected, huh?" Casey said dryly as he trudged upstairs behind the woman.

Stella Nissen did not answer until she had again taken up her knitting. Casey sat down opposite her and Wade parked in a rocking chair in one corner.

"You've got this wrong, Flash," she said finally.

"Maybe," Casey said, "but it won't be any novelty. You know a guy named Bert Jadick?"

"I know of him."

"He was knocked off last night. They found him this afternoon with two slugs in the chest." He paused, and when the woman made no reply he added: "Know a girl named Lucille Doucette?"

"Yes," Stella Nissen said. "And I know a little about the girl you're interested in." She straightened in her chair and with a tautness in her face said: "Why can't you trust me? I know what I'm doing. Give me a break and I'll get your girl back for you."

"Sure," scoffed Casey. "I'll bet. How?"

Stella Nissen laid aside her knitting, rose, went into an adjoining room and came back with a black over-night case. When she opened it all Casey could see was stack after stack of fifty-dollar bills. He kept staring until she closed the case and put it on the floor beside the desk; then he sucked in his breath and said:

"So—I was right, huh?"

"Yes. And you were right about the other part." Stella Nissen's voice choked a bit. "About Dan and me."

"What's the rest of it?" Casey asked.

"I'm making a trade."

"Swell."

"But you've got to go." The voice was sharp now, and Casey saw alarm and uneasiness in the depths of the woman's eyes. There was a whiteness about her lips and her jaw was set. "Please, Flash."

"No," Casey said stubbornly.

"You lied to Logan yesterday, and you must've stuck with it this morning. I can't figure women anyway, and there're too many mixed up in it now. I'm not going to take a chance of being crossed up. I'm here and—"

"Then go in the other room," Stella Nissen pleaded. "Stay there. And get him out," she added, indicating Tom Wade.

Casey stood up, scowled, sucked at his lip. Something in the woman's manner impressed him, but even now that he saw she was in earnest, he wouldn't take a chance. Stepping to the windows, he glanced out at the gently sloping roof.

"Out," he said to Wade. "Take the camera and use your head. Maybe there'll be a picture, and maybe there'll be trouble. If it's trouble, drop off the roof and get some help someplace. Come on." He pushed the protesting Wade through the window. When he had slid down out of sight, Casey stepped into the other room saying: "It better be good this time, Stella. Logan'll be here in another hour."

Casey had not been in the darkened bedroom more than five minutes when he heard footsteps on the stairs and a knock at the door. With his ear at the crack of the bedroom door he heard a man's voice say:

"We're coming in—with a gun!"

A door opened. Casey glued his eye to the crack, then stiffened there with every muscle tense as Edith French walked slowly into the room with her right wrist tied to the left wrist of the sleek brunette who had held him up the night before. Right behind, covering them with an automatic, was Nate Kilday.

It was but a second or two before the two girls moved past the door and out of Casey's sight, but that brief glimpse of them was sufficient for him to see the effects of their brutal experience upon them. Both were worn, haggard with this captivity and the pressure of their fears. Their dresses were mussed, their hair untidy. The brunette was no longer so sleek; she moved listlessly, with sullen eyes and a drooping mouth. Edith French was frightened and trying hard not to show it; her chin was up, her gaze straight ahead, her composure held under control by pride and breeding.

Strangely enough, Casey found time to notice the difference in the two women, to realize that, even in such reaction, class told. Then they were gone. Kilday said: "Got it?" and began to walk towards Casey, his back to the door.

Casey did not waste much time. Kilday held the gun with negligent confidence and when he stopped about two feet in front of the door, Casey pulled it open silently, took a step forward and swung his left while his right rapped down on the gun wrist.

The automatic was slapped to the floor and the fist caught Kilday under the ear, knocking the man halfway across the room so that he slid along on the side of his face before he stopped. Casey picked up the automatic, waited until Kilday pushed to a sitting position and blinked small black eyes that did not focus properly.

Casey stepped to the two women and untied their wrists. Edith French's smooth young face was chalky, her blue eyes wide. She looked very tired and wan, but she managed a faint smile and said: "Oh—" with tremendous relief.

"You all right?" Casey asked anxiously.

"Yes. Yes, of course. I—"

"And you're Lucille, huh?" Casey said to the stone-faced girl in the tight yellow dress.

Her eyes watched him dully, the only movement in her rouge-smeared face. Casey moved back to Kilday. "Suppose you get up and tell us about it," he said.

"Suppose you drop the gun, Flash!"

The voice, coming from behind, jerked Casey rigid. Sheer surprise held him immobile for an instant while he tried to fathom that crisp, authoritative command; then he began to breathe again. He was afraid to quit, to admit defeat now; yet he was experienced enough to know he did not have much chance. It was Stella Nissen who forced the issue.

"No, Flash," she said patiently. "I told you to stay there. Now drop it!"

Casey let go of the gun. It bounced on the edge of his shoe as he turned to face the smiling figure of Harvey Boyd who stood in the doorway, a small automatic in his hand.

While Nate Kilday covered Casey, who stood along the wall next to the two girls, Harvey Boyd counted the money in the black over-night case.

"An even two hundred grand, huh?" he said approvingly. "Marcy was a fool for trying to cross me."

"He didn't cross you," Stella said. "He just didn't trust you." She did not look up as she spoke, but kept busy with her knitting. "He took the rap. He intended to give you the fifty you had coming, but you wanted more."

Casey glanced about, his face grim and sweat-stained, his dark eyes miserable. He did not yet know the details, but he knew enough. Boyd had been in the lottery racket with Marcy, and yesterday afternoon there had been a showdown in Marcy's apartment. Now, for some reason, Stella was apparently willing to trade the money for the safety of the two girls who stood beside him.

Edith French stood very still, her blue eyes wide and frightened; Lucille Doucette—a change had come over this girl. At first her eyes had

been dull, her movements listless; now those eyes were as bright and hard as metal disks. Her painted face was taut, almost rigid and she watched Harvey Boyd with a breathless interest that Casey could not diagnose.

For his own part, Casey knew he had mufled it. He had been too confident, when he saw Kilday, that Kilday was the man. If only he had trusted Stella; if she had only trusted him. What happened before did not matter now; what did matter was what Boyd was going to do.

The click-click of the flashing knitting needles made a brittle, staccato sound that shattered the seconds of silence. Stella Nissen's face was as white and immobile as marble but her eyes were on Harvey Boyd.

"He called me before he died," she said. "I got the money from the bank this afternoon—just like you told me to. And now that you've made your deal, what are you going to do with it?"

"I've got to take a powder." Boyd swung the over-night case down from the desk and his voice got ugly. "And all because your boy friend blew his top yesterday and wouldn't play ball. I've got a plane at Hyannis airport. We'll tie you and Casey up so you won't make any trouble until we get clear. To make sure, we'll take the women with us. If we get in a jam before we take off—"

"Take the money and get out," Stella said viciously.

Boyd stood there and laughed, an imposing, red-haired figure in immaculate flannels.

"Got the cuffs, Nate?" he asked.

Kilday grunted and pulled a pair of handcuffs from a coat pocket with his left hand. Casey measured the six feet that separated him from Kilday, glanced at the window, wondering about Wade. Then, before he could look back, he heard Stella say: "All right, take it," and a gun began to roar.

Even then it seemed strange to Casey how clearly his mind could catalogue so many details in such a short space of time. In less than a second he was in action; but before that many things had happened.

Stella Nissen still held the knitting in her hands, but now there was a black hole with charred edges in the middle of the coral fabric. As Casey watched he saw the hole jump with the second bark of the gun. He saw Boyd stagger, recover, and drop the over-night case; then Casey leaped for Nate Kilday, who had tardily lifted his heavy automatic.

Casey was a step away when that gun leveled at Stella Nissen. Then Edith French, who stood beside Kilday, grabbed Kilday's gun arm with both hands.

Stella was still shooting.

Kilday cursed and flung Edith French viciously back against the

wall, and in that same instant Casey grabbed at the gun and hooked a right to the mouth.

Kilday dropped to his knees, the gun skidding along the floor. Casey's momentum carried him forward and before he could recover, Kilday tripped him and he went down with his head against the wall. For a moment, as he spun on one knee, the tableau he faced held motionless; then, from the open window, Wade's flash-bulb went off and everything happened at once.

From the corner of his eye Casey saw Wade fall away from the window. Lucille Doucette snatched up Kilday's heavy automatic while the fellow yanked a small gun from a shoulder holster. Across the room Boyd had gone to one knee and was trying to lift his gun. Casey lunged for Kilday. Simultaneously Lucille Doucette shot the man point-blank in the chest, swiveled with recoil and shot the sagging Boyd in the back.

The two men fell together, hitting the floor at the same time. Boyd never moved. Kilday tried to get up, rolled to one knee and sagged over on his face, one foot twitching.

Casey stood up, weak and shaken. Outside the window he heard somebody yelling. The voice sounded far away and he ignored it while he watched Stella Nissen and crushed out the tiny rims of flame that consumed the edges of the black and smoking knitting on the desk.

Abruptly the woman's face became distorted and she covered it with her hands and began to sob. Lucille Doucette dropped her gun and went to Stella Nissen, sinking to one knee beside her and holding her tight. Finally Edith French moved slowly up beside the desk. Her eyes filled; she seemed undecided for a moment; then she, too, joined them as background and heredity were erased by common trouble and the three became simply women in need of each other.

Casey turned away and had trouble swallowing until he became aware of the continued yelling outside the window. Climbing out on the roof, he saw the camera and plate-case, but no Wade—just his voice. Casey hurried down to the edge of the gently sloping roof, where Wade clung by his fingertips.

"What're you yelping about?" Casey snorted.

"Pull me up!" choked Wade. "I got rolling and I couldn't stop. I can't hold on much longer. Pull me up."

"Pull hell!" Casey growled. "Let go, ya lug. You've only got two feet to fall."

After Logan and two State policemen had heard what had happened to Kilday and Boyd, Logan stopped his pacing in front of Casey and said:

"Can you tell me the rest of it?"

He glanced at the bedroom door where Stella Nissen and Lucille Doucette waited. "If you can I'll listen and give them a chance to get straightened around."

"I've got enough to be interesting," Casey said dryly. "Boyd and Marcy were partners. When the Postal Inspectors cracked down somebody had to take the rap. There was over two hundred grand in the kitty and Marcy said he'd take the blame for an extra cut. Boyd agreed, but since Marcy was going to be away for a couple of years, he wanted to be damn sure that that money would be waiting when he got out.

"He had Stella put it in the Falmouth National; then he gave Boyd a phoney key to keep for him. That was smart enough, because Marcy had an idea Boyd would try to cross him. He did, but it wasn't long before he learned the key wasn't a safe deposit key at all."

"We found that out," Logan said sardonically. "It's a lousy padlock key."

"Well," Casey went on, "Marcy was afraid of trouble when he got out so he got in touch with Jadick —an old sidekick of his. Jadick was going to give him some protection. Meanwhile Boyd took Kilday—who had been nothing but a contact man and runner for Marcy—in on the plan, and they sent this other hood to Atlanta to follow Marcy. He was the guy you shot last night."

"Griefman," Logan added.

"The picture I took was just one of those things," Casey said. "Luck —coincidence. Marcy had a date with Boyd and Jadick was to come back later. Griefman was just hanging around to get the lay. Kilday told me a little about what happened at Marcy's place before he died.

"Boyd came ahead of time, there was an argument or something and Marcy got plugged." Casey spread his hands wearily. "Then the break came. Jadick, coming back, saw Boyd leaving. Jadick knew who had done the job—and Boyd knew that he knew. He and Lucille came down the street later on and the French girl followed them. Jadick remembered the picture and saw how he might get it. Lucille came to my place to bluff me and when I said I didn't have it she called Jadick. She didn't get an answer because Boyd, Kilday and Griefman were at Jadick's place to rub him out."

Casey stood up. "The rest of it you know, I guess. When Boyd found Edith French tied up in the bedroom, after he had shot Jadick, he had to take her because she was a witness: then Lucille walked in on the party and he had to grab her too. They carried out Jadick, and when they got rid of him, they went out with the two women, leaving Griefman behind to search the place. By that time Boyd was sure that Stella must have the money, or know where it was."

"You think she made a deal, huh?" Logan said thoughtfully. "She was a friend of Lucille's, and Boyd told her about the French girl—held them both as a threat."

When Casey did not answer, Logan's eyes narrowed and he said thinly:

"You don't think Stella offered Boyd the money so she could get him down here to take a shot at him, do you?"

"I don't know," Casey said. "If she did it was a good idea. You guys would never have put him on ice, anyway. And what difference does it make?"

"None, I guess," Logan admitted.

"Right," Casey said. "If she hadn't had that gun in her knitting it might have been tougher."

"Might have, huh?" Logan said, grinning a little.

"Anyway," Casey said, "that's all of it."

"Not quite," countered Logan. "What did the French girl follow Jadick and Lucille for? What the hell happened to that picture? Or is that part a fairy story?"

Casey's forehead clouded and his eyes were puzzled. "Hell," he grunted, "I forgot to ask about that. She's down telephoning in the story. Let's find out."

Edith French was just hanging up when Casey and Logan went down to the dimly lighted barroom. Wade, who had already taken some pictures for Casey, was sitting on a stool waiting.

"Why did you follow Jadick?" Casey asked the girl.

"Oh, that." Edith French hesitated, dropping her glance. "Why just after you'd gone into Marcy's apartment building the man we had seen holding the newspaper—"

"Griefman," Casey interrupted.

"—stepped up to the roadster with a gun. He wanted the plates. He must have seen you give them to me—or heard what you said. I—I had to give them to him."

She looked up shyly. "Then I didn't know what to do. I just sat there, afraid to go back to the office, afraid to come up and tell you. And while I was waiting I saw a car go by with Lucille in it. So I thought—well, I followed it and I guess they saw me. When I went into the building, they pulled me into their apartment."

"For—" Casey choked, tried again. "What did you take the chance for?"

"Well—I thought, that is, it seemed to be my fault. I knew you thought those two people were important, and I thought if I could tell you where they went you wouldn't be angry about my losing the plates."

Casey opened his mouth, closed it with an effort. Logan made a throaty noise, bent a knowing stare on the big photographer and discretely withdrew. Casey swallowed

and his muddled thoughts made his dark eyes baffled, ashamed.

And he had thought she had tried to outsmart him. He had given her a bad-mannered lecture yesterday, acted like a heel—and she had followed Jadick because she had been afraid of what he would say to her. Watching her now her youthful resilience amazed him. Already she had nearly recovered from her experience. She looked cool and fresh. And he stood here sweating like a tongue-tied lug, wanting to say the right thing and not knowing how to start. He was still fumbling for an opening when Wade spoke up.

"Hey, Flash," he said breezily. "I was thinking that if you want to stick around I could drive Miss French up in your roadster. You could ride with Logan."

Casey felt a quick pang of disappointment, but he rallied to the occasion. What the hell. Girls like this weren't for him. Just watching her made him feel older, wearier. She and Wade would have more to talk about.

"Sure," he said gruffly. "No use in your waiting."

"But," protested Edith French quickly, "couldn't Mr. Wade ride back with the police?"

Casey gaped and said: "Well—"

"Because," Edith French went on, "I'd like to ride with you." She looked up, eyes faintly mocking. "And you can tell me about other things I'll have to do to be a good reporter."

Casey accepted the dig with a grin and his spirits soared, the grin broadening from the stimulation of this unexpected triumph.

Cocking an eye at Wade, whose face had fallen until his chin nearly touched his chest, he took the girl's firm, rounded arm and swung her gently towards the door.

"Sure Wade can go with Logan," he said buoyantly. "He loves to ride in police cars."

WHAT HAPPENED TO OTTO?

A number of people are asking what happened to the onetime Major in the Luftwaffe who served for two years as advisor to General Pedro Rodriguez Echavarria, the recently ousted Dominican strongman. Otto Winter, a rather heavy Bavarian in his mid-forties, used to show up several times a week at *El Embajador* for swimming and cocktails. As the General's influence increased, Major Winter became just a shade more the onetime Luftwaffe officer, but since the General's arrest the Major has not been seen. There is an unconfirmed report that he is now working with the Duvalier regime in neighboring Haiti.

the flying man

by . . . Edward D. Hoch

THE SUMMER OF '96 had not been good to the people of Twisted River. Too hot, too dry, too lonely, surrounded by nothing but a desert which no one ever crossed and a line of high hills which few wanted to cross. It was a perfect place for a man like Ben Snow, who wanted to be forgotten, but the motives which kept the other three hundred-odd citizens in a dried-up hole like Twisted River were more difficult to pin down. Perhaps, in one way or another, it was the mine up in the hills that held them, with its promise of gold and enough occasional fulfillment to keep them content.

But outsiders, especially in that September of '96, tended to avoid the town. It was a place where time was standing still, where a few hundred people were rotting in the sun. Not a place to visit, or make a living, unless you enjoyed working down in the mine where the temperatures were sometimes thought to reach a hundred and twenty degrees.

One day was much like another in Twisted River, though, and that was something Ben Snow liked. He could stroll the dusty streets, earn

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Ed Hoch lives in upstate New York. Philip José Farmer, whose UPROAR IN ACHERON appeared in our May issue, lives out West. They do not know each other—and yet both have written, Farmer in his story and now Hoch about a side of life in the old West which we believe the TV serials have yet to report on.

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money at occasional odd jobs, even fish in the narrow stream that gave the place its name. There was even a girl named Sue, who worked at the small hotel where Ben had a room. Ben liked her. He liked the town in a crazy sort of way. And only the sheriff wore a gun.

This day—it was a Tuesday—there was an undercurrent of expectation in the streets where he came down from his room. "What's up, Sue?" he asked her, taking in the bright dotted shirt and tight pants that were her working clothes.

"Stranger headin' this way across the desert," she told him, as excited as the rest seemed to be. "He's got a wagon and everythin'!"

Strangers didn't come to Twisted River very often. In fact, this was the first one Ben could remember in the six months since he himself had ridden into town. He went out to the street in time to see a big wagon drawn by two horses just turning into town. The people had already surrounded it on all sides, crowding quietly close, and even from where he stood Ben could read the large garish sign which must have been the focus of interest at that moment: *Doc Robin, the Flying Man!*

Ben had seen quacks and medicine men all over the west, but at first sight this seemed something quite different. The man himself was tall and white-haired, though with a youngish face that made one suspect the hair. He spoke in a booming voice that carried from one end of the street to the other. "Gather round, gather round! Doc Robin, the Flying Man, has come to town to thrill and amaze you." And they gathered.

Ben stayed on the porch of the hotel, where he had a perfect view of the white-haired man as he went into his well-rehearsed speech. "Folks, I come to your fair town bearing the greatest invention the world has ever seen, an invention that at this moment is sweeping the east and midwest. No longer need man be grounded to the earth like the snakes and lizards—now he can *fly,* like the eagles and the hawks, *fly* like he was meant to! Here," and he tugged at a cord that released a whole side of the wagon's canvas covering, "here you can feast your eyes upon *it!*"

Ben feasted, and the thing he saw was a contraption like a giant set of wings, or rather a double set—one above the other. They had a span of perhaps fifteen feet, with a metal bar in the center of the lower pair, where a man apparently could hang on. "You mean those things fly?" someone shouted from the crowd. Ben recognized Frank McCoen from the livery stable. "Maybe you can put some on my horses!"

But Doc Robin was apparently used to the heckling. Already he was passing out handbills among the crowd. Ben took one and saw at once that it was indeed an im-

pressive thing. There were pictures —actual photographs—of a man flying through the air supported only by the double pair of wings. And there were articles from a number of big Eastern papers, including the *New York Times*. The man in the pictures was a German named Otto Lilienthal, who'd made more than a thousand successful glides with a series of "hanging gliders" which he'd built.

"Yes, my friends," Doc Robin was saying again. "You see it, but you still doubt. I recognize the doubt in your faces. Well, tomorrow morning on that hill yonder I'm going to show it to you in the flesh. I'm going to fly off the hill with this set of wings! And when I land, when you're all convinced that man at last can fly with the birds, I'm going to give each and every one of you an opportunity to place your orders for these wings. Laugh, laugh now if you want—you won't be laughing tomorrow. Why, right now these things are so popular back in New York that the police are considering special traffic regulations. The people are gliding right off the *buildings*—I've seen it myself!"

He went on like that for the better part of an hour, and Ben could see he was beginning to convince even the more doubting members of the crowd. If nothing else, he would have a big turnout in the morning. Through it all, Ben noticed Sheriff Hanson leaning against the bank building across the street, taking it all in, the badge and the gun at his side occasionally catching the sunlight's glint when he moved. Apparently he was as interested as anyone else, and not at all about to run Doc Robin and his wagon out of town.

After a time Ben grew bored and drifted away, down toward the stream now almost dried to death at the end of the scorching summer. There'd be no fish to catch for quite some time. . . .

He ate supper at the hotel with Sue, as he'd been doing most every night for weeks. Some nights they'd saddle up their horses and ride out across the desert for a few miles, where there was nothing but the stars. Tonight, though, he felt unaccountably restless, as if somehow the coming of Doc Robin had disturbed the peaceful equilibrium he'd been so long building.

"No ride tonight, Ben?" she asked.

"No. Little sleepy. Guess I'm getting old."

"At thirty-seven? I never heard you say that before."

"Sometimes I think I should go east, Sue. Maybe to New York."

"Where the men fly off the buildings?"

He laughed and started to roll a cigarette. "I doubt that, somehow. But . . ."

"There he is!" she whispered sud-

denly. "He's coming toward our table!"

And indeed it was Doc Robin, tall and snow-haired, moving between the tables toward them. "Ah," he said when he'd reached their side, "do I have the honor of addressing Mr. Ben Snow?"

"Don't know as it's much honor, but I'm Ben Snow all right. What can I do for you, Doc?"

"A slight business matter. Could the charming young lady excuse us?"

"Sure," Sue said, slipping out of her chair. "I'll be over at Frank's stable with the horses, Ben, if you change your mind about that ride." She smiled a bit uncertainly at Doc Robin and was gone.

"What's this all about?" Ben asked.

"Could we talk somewheres private—maybe up in your room?"

"I guess so." Ben led the way upstairs, wondering what had prompted Robin to find out his name and where he was staying. "Here we are."

His room was hardly a place for entertaining, with a brass bed, wash bowl, lamp, chair, and a dull gray of wallpaper broken only by a faded portrait of General Custer. But Doc Robin seemed not to mind. He motioned Ben to the only chair and sat down on the edge of the bed himself. "Ah! Fine. Now to business."

"What kind of business?" Ben asked suspiciously.

"Let me start by saying I know who you really are."

Ben felt the old terror rising inside him. Not again, God. Not again. "I'm Ben Snow. Nobody else."

Doc Robin smiled. "Don't try to fool me. I was an old friend of General Lew Wallace. Used to have dinner with him. Fought with him in the Civil War. Don't look fifty, do I? Except for the hair, but that's good for business."

Ben cut in on the rambling with, "Only Lew Wallace I know of is the man who wrote that book. *Ben-Hur*. And I never met him."

"Maybe you didn't meet him in person, but that's the man I'm talking about just the same. Governor of the New Mexico territory he was, back in '79 and '80 when Billy the Kid was shootin' up the place. He was working on his book then, I guess. I was out there to visit him, and I heard all about Billy the Kid."

"Then you heard he was killed by a sheriff in '81."

"Maybe Lew Wallace and the rest of the lawmen thought he was killed, but there's those of us who know better," Robin said slyly. "There's those of us who know he's been alive all these years, traveling around the west—using the name of Ben Snow."

"Get out, Robin. I don't like your sort of business."

"But it *is* business, Billy—Ben—and there's money in it for you. I want to hire your gun for tomor-

row, for a hundred dollars."

"Oh?" Ben settled back in his chair. This was beginning to sound interesting. "Who do I have to kill?"

"Probably no one. That's why it's so damned easy. After I make my flight in the morning I take orders for these things. A hundred dollars apiece—ten bucks now and the rest when I deliver 'em. In a town this size, full of gold mine money and all, I'll probably sell close to a hundred sets of wings. That's a thousand dollars all told cash in the hand. You get a hundred of it for makin' sure nothing happens to me."

"Like what? Like Sheriff Hanson arresting you?"

Doc Robin smiled. "We understand each other. That, among other things. Someone might try to take the money away from me, in one way or another."

Ben sighed, feeling tired. "You're nothing but a confidence man. You have no intention of delivering wings to these people. You'll take their ten dollars each, all right, but they'll never see you again. You want me to cover you while you slip out of town tomorrow night."

"And you'll do it, Billy."

"Like hell I will! And the name is still Ben. Do your own shooting!"

"I'm too old for gunplay. Bad eyes. Flying that thing is dangerous enough."

"If you can really fly with it, why not really sell them? Some people are crazy enough to buy them. Why turn it into a confidence game?"

Doc Robin looked a bit sad at this. "There are complications. For one thing, that German Lilienthal was killed last month flying one of the things. But I didn't bring those clippings along."

"He was killed and you're still going out there and glide off a cliff in the morning?" The man amazed Ben more with every statement.

"A thousand dollars is mighty good pay for two days' work. It's well worth the risk. I've hit three towns in the last two weeks, and I got the next one all picked out. Going to work my way to California and retire on a fortune. Beautiful country out there."

"Why did you pick this place?"

"Because of the gold mine. The folks must have money. I cleaned up in Texas, in the cattle country. Hundred twenty-two orders in one place."

"There's not much money here. Take my word for it and clear out tonight. I'm not handling a gun for you. I don't even have a gun any more."

Doc Robin shrugged. "Guess I'll have to get someone else then. The peace of mind's worth the hundred it costs me. Never did like gunplay."

"What if I tell the folks you're a swindler?"

The white-haired man smiled. "Then I tell 'em you're Billy the Kid. Wouldn't like that, would you?" He slid off the bed and

picked up his hat. "See you in the morning?"

"If I don't sleep late."

Doc Robin smiled and went out. After a moment Ben latched the door and unhitched one of his saddle-bags. He came up with a dull bronzed Derringer he hadn't loaded in months. It only took two .45 slugs, but that would be enough. He wasn't about to start guarding swindlers from the law, but he might need the weapon for other purposes now. . . .

The morning was sunny, with a bit of a breeze from the direction of the western hills. By the time Ben reached the street he could see that most of the town was already up there, waiting to see the Flying Man. Sue had waited for him and they walked up together, along with Jethro Aarons from the bank. Sheriff Hanson was already on the scene, standing with his foot on a convenient rock, seeing everything and everybody. And Frank McCoen, come perhaps to see the twilight of his beloved horses in the glory of this new flying device. And Sue's brother Tommy, an unfriendly youth no doubt hoping to see some sort of tragedy. They all came, and gathered close around Doc Robin and his remarkable wings.

"I want to go closer, Ben," Sue said.

Jethro Aarons was resting on a rock. "You two go ahead. This climbing's bad for my leg."

But in a moment Ben had lost Sue in the push of the people. There was only the crowd, the mob, wanting to see a man perform a miracle. And Doc Robin was not about to disappoint them. He was poised on his toes, with the great double wings above him as he gripped the bar and tensed his tall body for the run. Ahead of him, the hill fell suddenly away to the desert floor below, and a few of the townspeople had gathered there, to see his landing. Then, with the breeze at his back, he started to run.

It was a moment Ben Snow would never forget. His feet left the earth as if plucked by a giant invisible hand, and Doc Robin was airborne. Outlined against the morning sky like some giant bird from prehistory, swooping down over the desert floor, carried by the same wind that caressed the tumbleweed and shifted the rippled sands. Doc Robin, the Flying Man.

And then, when the sudden roar of the delighted crowd had reached its peak, something happened. The white-haired man seemed abruptly to loosen his grip on the wings. He hung there another moment, held by the system of bars and struts, then detached from the life-giving wings like an eagle's victim being dropped in flight. With no controlling weight the wings themselves began an eccentric final glide to earth, but Doc Robin's body hit first, bouncing a bit as it collided with the sandy desert floor. Behind

Ben someone screamed, and then everyone was running at once.

Sheriff Hanson reached the body a moment before Ben and several others. He turned him over, feeling for his heart, but the hand came away sticky with blood. "Dead," he said simply.

"From the fall?" someone asked.

Sheriff Hanson shook his head without looking up. "Appears to me he's been shot. Murdered. . . ."

"Who killed Doc Robin?" Jethro Aarons was asking, his leg resting stiffly out in front of him as he recovered from the exertion of the climb. "I guess that's the question, all right." They were gathered in the main lobby of the little bank, for no good reason except that Twisted River's leading citizens had taken to gathering there of late, perhaps in unspoken recognition of the fact that it was difficult for Aarons to walk very far elsewhere.

Sheriff Hanson was there, of course, and Frank McCoen from the stables, and a number of others Ben knew by sight. No one had excluded him, so he'd remained, on the fringes of the crowd while the town fathers talked. The body had been removed to the local undertaker's dwelling, and Robin's wagon sat lonely and abandoned before the hotel. "Well, I think McCoen shot him to keep the horses in business," Coxen the mine owner said, but no one laughed.

"You just shut up," McCoen answered. "How in hell could I hit a man with a pistol at that range?"

Sheriff Hanson cleared his throat. "I don't think anyone could hit him with a pistol from the ground."

"You think maybe the killer was up there with him—invisible?"

"No—I think he was killed with a rifle. It looked to me like a rifle would make that sort of wound."

Jethro Aarons got carefully to his feet and hobbled across the room. "That's even more fantastic. No one had a rifle up there today."

"No one even had a pistol but the sheriff," Coxen added, pointedly.

"I've got my deputies up there now, searching the rocks for the weapon. I think the killer took it up there and hid it early this morning, so it would be all ready."

"But he didn't even know where Robin was goin' to take off from, did he? How could he know where to hide it? And what motive could he have for killing Robin?"

It became a general exchange of opinions then, and Ben decided there was no more to be learned here. He slipped out the door into the noonday sun, looking casually up and down the street for Sue. She was nowhere in sight, but her brother Tommy slouched against the unused hitching post in front of the tavern.

"Where's Sue, Tommy?"

"How should I know? I don't keep a chain on her. Maybe I should, though, huh?"

Ben started to ignore him, but the temptation of his foot blocking a portion of the wooden sidewalk was too much to resist. He swung his boot and caught Tommy just behind the knee, collapsing him in a heap. "Damn you, Snow! I'll get you for that!"

"Sure," Ben said, walking on. "You do that."

Sue was at the stables again, which didn't really surprise him. With McCoen more interested in the murder, someone had to take care of the horses. She looked up as he entered, smiling, "Where were you, Ben?"

"Around. Want to go for that ride now?"

"It's hot out there in the afternoon sun."

"I was thinking we might ride up into the mountains. I want to ask you a few things."

Her expression was curious but unquestioning. "Sure." She started to saddle up her horse, a great powerful bay who could have been a racer back east. He'd told her once they should go to Kentucky for the Derby, but of course they hadn't, and he'd heard a horse named Ben Brush had won the race that year. Since then, when Sue was being funny, she called her bay *Ben*—whether for Brush or Snow he'd never asked.

They rode out of town the back way, avoiding the tensions of Main Street and the scattered groups of gossips and speculators. The sun was as hot as she'd said, but up among the foothills there were shady stretches where the horses could graze while Ben and Sue talked.

"You and your brother have been here all your lives. Tell me a little about some of these other people."

"About them? What about them, Ben?"

"The sheriff, for instance. Has he just always been here?"

She laughed a little, sadly. "Tommy and I are about the only ones in town who've *always* been here. Sheriff Hanson came when I was fifteen—six or seven years ago. He's a good man for the job, I suppose, though until now we never had any crime to speak of. A drunken Indian or two, that was about all."

"What about some of the others? Aarons and Coxen? And McCoen?"

"I don't know much about Coxen. He just all of a sudden appeared and became manager of the mine. Jethro Aarons has been here a few years. He had a bank in Kansas City but decided to go further west. On the trip a band of outlaw Indians broke out of a reservation and shot up his train. His knee was shattered by a bullet and he hasn't walked right since. And Frank McCoen—well, you know him pretty well yourself."

"I know he loves horses. I don't know whether he'd kill for them

or not. Doc Robin might have been an enemy to him."

"That's silly! Frank wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Maybe."

"We'd better be getting back, Ben. We didn't really tell Frank we were going, and someone should be watching the horses. Besides, Mr. Komar at the hotel will think I deserted him."

"What about him?"

"Ben, stop it! Are you trying to be a detective or something?"

"Someone has to get to the bottom of this business."

"Well, not you. That's the sheriff's job."

They rode back in silence, and found the town much as they'd left it. Someone had brought Doc Robin's wings in from the desert and put them in front of the undertaker's place, like some weird appendage to be buried with the corpse. But now things were quiet at the bank and Ben wondered where the village fathers were.

He found out quickly enough. As they rounded the corner in front of the stables, he saw Jethro Aarons towering over a little group of them. Sheriff Hanson was at their front, and his hand was resting too casually on his gun butt. "What's up, Sheriff?" Ben called, already somehow knowing.

"Going to have to ask you some questions, Ben. Get down off the horse."

He could feel the hard pressure of the tiny Derringer in his pocket and he wondered if this would be his last chance to use it. No, he couldn't risk killing innocent people. This was a time for answering questions. "Take my horse, Sue."

"What is it, Ben? What do they want? Sheriff, what's the meaning of all this?"

Hanson motioned with his hand, and Ben saw Sue's brother standing near the edge of the group. "This boy has made some grave charges against you, Ben. Says he heard Robin talking to you last night. Says Robin accused you of being . . ."

"Tommy! How could you?" She went to him, her face a fury of betrayal.

". . . of being Billy the Kid."

The words fell like a rumble of thunder, and even Sue turned ashen. "Ben . . ."

"Billy the Kid's been dead fifteen years," Ben said quietly.

"I heard him! I heard him say it to you. I was right outside the door!" Tommy was in the limelight now, and enjoying every minute of it. This was the revenge he'd so long sought against his sister's lover.

And Frank McCoen joined in. "I heard tell of a man named Snow, out Arizona way. Fast with a gun, and said to be Billy the Kid. Never connected him with you, though. You always seemed such a nice fellow, Ben."

Ben stood his ground, but his

heart was beating faster. The urge to run was upon him, the old familiar urge that had followed him across the west. Why should he worry about this little town that had turned on him? Why not pull his gun and shoot his way out of Twisted River and be done with Sue and her brother and the fishing and all the rest of it. . . . Why not?

But instead he asked, in a level voice, "Well, Sheriff, have your men found the rifle yet?"

"No, it's not up there anywhere. But you were just out for a ride in that direction, weren't you?"

Sue jumped back into the battle. "That's a damned lie, whatever you're thinkin'. I didn't have my eyes off him the whole ride. He never went near no rifle!" Her tiny breasts were heaving in anger.

"Calm down now, Miss."

"Well, how do you think I shot Doc Robin without a rifle, Sheriff?"

"Don't know exactly how, but you're the only one with a motive. He knew you were Billy the Kid so you killed him."

Something clicked in Ben's mind then, like the final bullet sliding into the chamber. He knew—he knew and he could tell them. But should he? Would it mean only more killing in this peaceful place? Would he be able to stay now whatever he might do? "Let me talk to you alone, Sheriff. I think I can tell you who killed Doc Robin."

"Be careful—it's a trick of some sort." This was Coxen, the man from the mine, a man no one ever noticed until he spoke.

Sheriff Hanson smiled a bit. "I think I can take care of myself. We'll go over to my office, Ben. I hope for your sake you have a good story to tell. . . ."

Ben sat across the desk from him, feeling already a prisoner as Hanson carefully placed his gun on the scarred wood between them. Hanson was a friendly man, an honest man, but he almost seemed to be daring Ben to try for that gun. Perhaps any small town sheriff would like to tell his grandchildren he shot Billy the Kid, even if it wasn't true.

"Start talkin', Ben."

"All right. You start listening, because we probably haven't much time."

"What's goin' to happen?" The hint of a smile was back again.

"Just listen. What Tommy says is true—Robin did think I was Billy the Kid. He was nothing but a con man, a guy who'd latched onto this flying invention back east and hoped to make some money off it. The German who made those thousand glides wearing the wings is dead, by the way, but Robin wasn't telling that part. He planned to collect a ten dollar deposit against the delivery of the wings, then sneak out of town tonight. I was to cover him in case there was trouble, only I refused to go along with it. Anyway, when he left my

room he said he'd have to get someone else, and that was the tip-off. You had the right motive, Sheriff, but the wrong killer."

Over his head the clock was ticking loudly. The afternoon was almost gone. "What do you mean, Ben?"

"When Robin left my room he sought out someone else, some other resident of Twisted River that he'd recognized as an ex-gunman. He must have found someone, since he was willing to go through with his scheme today. Only the second person he approached was a man whose position here could not be endangered. This man would have no two-bit con man exposing his past life. Robin had to die, even while he thought the killer had agreed to work with him."

"Makes sense. If you can name names."

"I can, Sheriff. Think about it—Doc Robin spotted me because I was standing on the hotel porch while he talked, right in his line of vision. But he told me he had bad eyes. Would he be likely, after several years, to recognize or even notice a person like Coxen, for example?"

"I guess not."

"He'd notice someone like you, though. A con man would always notice the Sheriff." Hanson's hand edged toward the gun as Ben spoke the words. "But then there was the problem of the rifle. Robin was killed with a rifle and your deputies found no weapon hidden up in the hills. Therefore the killer brought the rifle with him, shot Robin while the crowd's attention was focused on the flying man, and then took the weapon away with him."

"Who could have done that? All I carry is a pistol, and no one else in town carries any weapon at all."

"Exactly, Sheriff. A rifle is an obvious weapon, not the kind easily concealed."

"I read somewhere about sawed-off ones . . ."

"They wouldn't have the accuracy at the range in question. No, this had to be a full-sized rifle in the hands of an expert marksman."

"Who?"

"A rifle could perhaps be hidden under a woman's skirts with some difficulty, but Robin would hardly have approached a woman to cover his escape. And what man, of all the men who walked up there this morning, could have concealed a rifle on his person? Only one—the stiff-legged banker of Twisted River, Mr. Jethro Aarons."

"Impossible!"

"Is it, Sheriff? He fits all the facts. An important position to protect, a bad limp and tall stature that make him stand out in any crowd, and a perfect place to conceal a rifle—up his pants-leg!"

"Without anyone seeing him?"

"He hobbled up with us, but paused back among the rocks. He was behind the crowd, and no one was looking when he pulled out the rifle and shot the man who was fly-

ing above their heads. Then he simply slid the rifle back up his pants, next to his stiff leg, and walked back down with the rest of you. He's a tall man, remember, with long legs."

"Maybe," Hanson conceded. "Just maybe."

"You know that Aarons rarely walks anywhere because of his leg. You even hold your meetings in the bank for his convenience. Didn't it strike you as odd that he should hobble all the way up there over rough ground—even to see a man fly through the air?"

The sheriff got to his feet and picked up the pistol. "Let's go talk to him."

They went down the dusty wooden steps and started to slant across the street to the red brick bank building. They were perhaps in the middle of the street when the crack of a rifle split through the afternoon quiet. Hanson grabbed for his shoulder, spinning at the bullet's impact, and went down.

"That could have been through the head just as well," a voice spoke from the sheltered doorway of the bank, and Ben saw Jethro Aarons standing there, his rifle pointing like a third eye.

"You've killed one man already today," Ben said, edging nearer. The Derringer was still in his pocket, and useless at this range. "Isn't that enough?"

The sound of the shot had attracted people, and young Tommy was the first to arrive, running into the range of the banker's rifle before he realized what was happening. Aarons shifted his weapon slightly to cover the youth. "All right, boy. You're in it now. See that wagon down the street? You're going to drive me out of town in that, and if you want to live you don't try anything."

Tommy started to back away. "I . . . Mr. Aarons . . . what . . . ?"

"He killed Doc Robin, Tommy. He did, not me. And I'll venture that's not the first man he's killed."

"Cut the talk," Aarons growled. "Get that wagon, boy, and drive it right up here in front of the bank. Remember, this rifle has quite a range, and I can even pick off men who are flying!"

"Who are you, Aarons?" Ben asked, edging a step nearer. "A gunman?"

"I was, years back. The fastest shot in Kansas. But Kansas got civilized too damn fast for me. I worked in a bank for a while, and then took a little of their loose money and came west to open up my own. A sheriff's shotgun did this to my knee and I decided to go straight. Twisted River was the place for it till Doc Robin happened along. He might have had bad eyes, but he had a memory for faces. I couldn't have anyone spoiling my setup. Didn't count on a smart guy like you—not till I saw you looking at me back at the stable."

"Let us help Hanson. He's bleeding to death."

"No one goes near Hanson or his gun till I'm out of here in that wagon."

"Our horses could catch you in ten minutes."

"Try it and the boy dies." Tommy had brought the wagon around, his hands trembling on the reins. He was no longer the wise-guy brother hating his sister's lover. Now he was only a frightened youth staring at the threat of death for the first time. And not liking what he saw. He was of a different generation, not the gunfighter or the pioneer, but the first of a new lot.

Ben was near enough now, and as Jethro Aarons started his awkward climb into the wagon, he could have blown his head off with two shots from the Derringer. But the rifle barrel was almost touching the back of Tommy's neck. Ben owed the boy less than nothing, and perhaps that was the reason, oddly, that he spoke first.

"I'm drawing on you, Aarons!"

The tall man turned, swinging the rifle barrel in an arc that seemed almost slow to Ben's eye. The smile on his lips was the old gunfighter's smile, and perhaps it was because Aarons was a gunfighter that he chose to fire on Ben rather than Tommy. He didn't seem surprised to see the Derringer, or perhaps it was too fast for him ever to see. His own shot buzzed past Ben's cheek to kick up the dust ten feet beyond. Ben fired from the hip in the same instant and killed him with the single shot. . . .

Later, when the cool of the night had come sweeping across the plain, Ben and Sue rode out under the stars. He knew he would be leaving soon—there was no longer a place for him in Twisted River now. But for tonight he needn't think about that.

"It was odd," he said, riding slowly beside Sue. "Doc Robin could have earned that money honestly just by charging folks to watch him fly. And Jethro Aarons needn't have feared him at all. And chances are the townspeople wouldn't have done too much if they had known about Aarons."

"They would have drawn their money out of his bank."

"Probably," he sighed. "Money, it's always money. Doc Robin wanted to make it crooked when he could have made it honest, and Jethro Aarons wanted to make it honest when he could have made it crooked. People are pretty strange."

"Were you scared out there, Ben?"

"Scared? No, I knew I could outshoot him."

"Knew it? But how could you?"

He smiled a strange sort of smile, the smile of a wanderer, of a gunfighter. "Doc Robin knew about both of us," he said simply. "And he tried to hire me first. . . ."

(Continued from other side)

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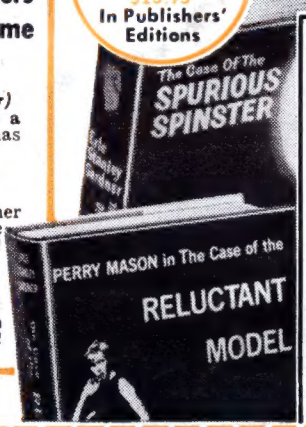

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